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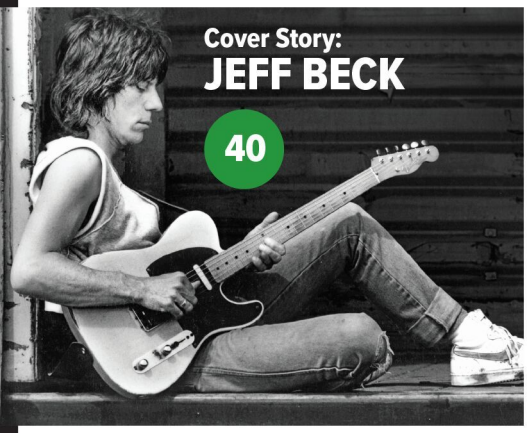
CONTENTS



INTERVIEWS

18 Kingswood
19 Knocked Loose
20 Teenage Dads
22 Animals as Leaders
24 Larkin Poe
26 Marcus King
28 Ash Grunwald
30 Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram
32 Eric Gales
34 Bonnie Raitt
36 Steve Vai

FEATURES

40 Jeff Beck
56 Asymmetrical Guitars
64 King Gizzard & the Lizard Wizard

REGULARS

04 News
08 Fresh Frets
10 Spotlight
12 Axes in Action: Good Things
14 Axes in Action: Paul Kelly
15 Axes in Action: The Killers
16 Axes in Action: Enter Shikari
80 Hot Gear
85 Studio Tips
98 End Note

LESSONS

70 Learn to Play: Oasis – Half The World Away
72 Tablature: Iron Maiden – Run For The Hills

REVIEWS

◀ **90** Gretsch G5222 Electromatic Double Jet BT V-Stoptail & G5232T Electromatic Double Jet FT with Bigsby
92 Recording King G6 Series Solid Top Dreadnaught with Cutaway
93 EarthQuaker Devices Special Cranker
94 Blackstar Dept. 10 Amped 1
95 Laney Supergroup LA-Studio head
96 Markbass Little Mark 58R / MB58R 102 PURE
97 Godin Radium-X

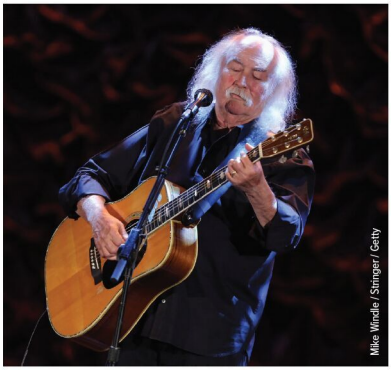
METALLICA UNVEIL CUSTOM ONE-OF-A-KIND 'FLYING M' GUITAR

In November last year, Metallica surprised everyone by dropping a new single completely out of the blue. Titled Lux Æterna, the track was the first single lifted from the band's 12th studio album, 72 Seasons – again, that was a surprise – which is due April 14. Now, in a bid to capitalize the hype and raise money for charity, Metallica have unveiled the Flying M – a custom, one-of-a-kind electric guitar that will be raffled off to support their All Within My Hands foundation. Sporting the signatures of each Metallica member, the guitar itself was crafted by Highline Guitars' Chris Monck and the team at Inventables, and features a Metallica 'M' on the wing of each side of the guitar, as well as a 12th-fret Metallica sawblade inlay.

Although initially inspired by James Hetfield's own trademark Flying V, the Flying M comes loaded with Kirk Hammett EMG humbuckers and a Floyd Rose-style trem system, and boasts a build schematic that comprises mahogany, ebony and sheets of aluminum composite. It also comes with a custom M-emblazoned hardcase.

The guitar will be winnable via donations made to Metallica's All Within My Hands foundation, which is raising money for the Metallica Scholars initiative. The Scholars is a workforce education program that provides direct support to community colleges to enhance their career and technical education programs. For more info, visit https://fandiem.com/sweeps/metallica-flying-m-guitar .

Words by Matt Owen



Mike Windle / Stringer / Getty

DAVID CROSBY DIES AT 81

David Crosby, guitarist and co-founder of the Byrds and Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young, has died at the age of 81. The singer's death was confirmed by his wife, Jan, in a statement to Variety. "It is with great sadness after a long illness, that our beloved David (Croz) Crosby has passed away," the statement reads. "He was lovingly surrounded by his wife and soulmate Jan and son Django. Although he is no longer here with us, his humanity and kind soul will continue to guide and inspire us."

As a founding member and guitar player for the Byrds and Crosby, Stills & Nash (and sometimes Young), David Crosby was a hugely influential figure in the development of rock in the '60s and '70s. His distinct songwriting and guitar playing played an incalculable role in shaping the sound of both acts, who in turn influenced countless guitarists and musicians in their wake, and sold millions of records each. **Words by Jackson Maxwell**

Burak Cingi / Getty

FALL OUT BOY'S JOE TROHMAN STEPS AWAY FROM BAND FOR MENTAL HEALTH REASONS

Fall Out Boy guitarist Joe Trohman has announced he's temporarily stepping away from the band in order to focus on his "rapidly deteriorating" mental health.

The band – shortly after announcing their new album, So Much (For) Stardust – posted a statement written by Trohman on their social media accounts, with the electric guitar star confirming he will be leaving the band for a spell.

"Neil Young once howled that it's better to burn out than to fade away. But I can tell you unequivocally that burning out is dreadful," Trohman wrote. "Without divulging all the details, I must disclose that my mental health has rapidly deteriorated over the past several years. So, to avoid fading away and never returning," he continued, "I will be taking a break from work which regrettably includes stepping away from Fall Out Boy for a spell."

Trohman went on to say the decision to step back before the release of So Much (For) Stardust was a painful one, though he reassured fans he will "one-hundred percent" return to the group's lineup when the time is right for him. **Words by Matt Owen**

AUSTRALIAN guitar™

#152

EDITORIAL
EDITOR Shaun Prescott
EDITOR-AT-LARGE Ellie Robinson
ART DIRECTOR Kristian Hagen

CONTRIBUTORS
Alex Lynham • Amit Sharma • Anna Rose
David Mead • Jenna Scaramanga • Joe Bosso
Ellie Robinson • Joe Matera • Nick Guppy
Neville Marten • Paul Riario • Richard Bienstock
Sam Roche • Steve Henderson • Stuart Williams
Trevor Curwen • Dave Burrluck • Peter Hodgson

ADVERTISING
NATIONAL ADVERTISING MANAGER
Lewis Preece
EMAIL lewis.preece@futurenet.com
ADVERTISING CO-ORDINATOR Di Preece
EMAIL diane.preece@futurenet.com

SUBSCRIPTIONS
techmags.com.au or call
+61 2 8277 6486
PO Box Q1179 Queen Victoria Building, NSW 1230

FUTURE

MANAGING DIRECTOR Neville Daniels.

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CLAY J GLADSTONE

SO, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
Tim [Wisbey, vocals] and Matt [David, guitars] are from Camden in Sydney's southwest, a town that literally didn't even have a set of traffic lights until, like, 2010. That should give you an indication of what a happening place Camden is. The best thing about Camden is that it's not Campbelltown and you can leave easily.

WHAT'S YOUR LATEST DROP?
Our latest jam, 'Where Do Ya Want Me?', is a pumping indie-punk jam that you can circle pit to while punishing a beer.

HOW WOULD YOU SELL YOUR SOUND?
My Chemical Romance meets Fireball shots, meets The Strokes on human growth hormones.

WHAT ARE THE GO-TO JAMS ON YOUR TOUR VAN PLAYLISTS?
We're trying to have a bop and maybe slide a few giggle jams in there too, nothing worse than a playlist that becomes an edge lord competition. We keep it democratic with a shared Spotify list that at a glance looks like Korn, Jeff Rosenstock, Blink 182, NIN, Hobo Johnson, Lil Big and The Bronx.

IN WHAT SETTING DOES YOUR MUSIC *TRULY* COME TO LIFE?
Have you ever been to the Mariana Trench? If you can't make it there, crank us while you're pouring gasoline onto a bonfire at your next house party.

IT'S 2012 AND THIS IS TUMBLR... WHAT'S ON YOUR MOODBOARD?
Nothing hypothetical here, baby! *fuckyeahmattyd.tumblr.com* was mad active in 2012. But to represent us? Thrasher Magazine Skate Rock, that one JPEG image of Sonny Moore – you know the one – Zyzz, Blink-182 running down the street in the nude, and Karen O or Pete Doherty in their peak "indie sleaze" era.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?
We only lift weights so we can hug you even tighter.

Photo by Colin Jeffs

DEAD WITCH

SO, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
We're all from Sydney's inner-west, home to some pretty incredible live music venues. We're also big fans of Enmore Road sunsets – it sounds corny but damn, they're iconic.

WHAT'S YOUR LATEST DROP?
Our self-titled debut EP came out last November and we couldn't be prouder. It's a little psych and a little rock 'n' roll, and it starts off with a seven-minute instrumental called 'Falling In Line', which was probably the first song we ever wrote together. There's four songs and it's a nice lil' 20-minute listen, which sounds best turned up in your car with mates, windows down on the way to the beach.

HOW WOULD YOU SELL YOUR SOUND?
It's like eating Cadbury Marvellous Creations: sweet and crunchy, full of surprises and a bit of crackle and pop, leaving you with just the right amount of zing.

WHAT ARE THE GO-TO JAMS ON YOUR TOUR VAN PLAYLISTS?
We're *big* Rolling Stones fans. We also love Led Zeppelin, Velvet Underground, Boy Toy, Tom Petty, Fleetwood Mac, Grace Cummings, The Uplifting Bell Ends, Black Sabbath, Motley Crue, AC/DC, Ty Segall, Amyl And The Sniffers, Nice Biscuit... The list is pretty extensive, how much time you got?

IN WHAT SETTING DOES YOUR MUSIC *TRULY* COME TO LIFE?
When you're having shower beers, getting ready for a night out with your mates that no-one will remember. There's likely a gig involved, Beam scooters, drunken People's Burger and an Instagram Story that will need deleting later on.

IT'S 2012 AND THIS IS TUMBLR... WHAT'S ON YOUR MOODBOARD?
An early press shot of The Runaways, a vintage Flying V, the photo of Bianca Jagger's AAA pass clipped onto her white '70s heeled platform, a bum in a pair of killer denim flares, silver glitter poured out onto a table... And probably a sick live shot of Tame Impala on their *Lonerism* tour.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?
We're all really bloody close friends first and foremost, but we reckon that's pretty obvious when we're onstage. We try to have fun and not take ourselves too seriously.

Photo by Tom Wilkinson

FAN GIRL

SO, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
We grew up in different spots around Melbourne, but have surprisingly found ourselves all in Brunswick. Our studio is also in Brunswick, which is very good indeed, but maybe the best thing about Brunswick is the cheap (and wonderful) Lebanese food, and the expensive (and delicious, and pretentious) coffee.

WHAT'S YOUR LATEST DROP?
Our latest single, 'react (react)', came out last November, and everyone should listen to it because it is very much like a succulent, salty, sensuous Sicilian Olive – like the ones in the movies. Not for children, easy to digest, very more-ish, and is in E-Flat Major – the key of love (scientifically proven, Google it).

HOW WOULD YOU SELL YOUR SOUND?
It sounds a lot like a fight in a commercial kitchen: there's people yelling, people crying, pans flying everywhere, fridges buzzing, a whole lot of butter (like three times the amount you'd use at home) and no air-con. Much like in a kitchen, all of these factors come together harmoniously to create the perfect meal. It also sounds a bit like The Strokes and Car Seat Headrest.

WHAT ARE THE GO-TO JAMS ON YOUR TOUR VAN PLAYLISTS?
We used to listen to a tonne of our friends' incredible music – artists like Obscura Hail, Elizabeth M Drummond, Bakers Eddy, Merpire, murmurmur and countless others – until Luke broke the stereo. We now play 20 Questions, but the answer is always Brad Pitt.

IN WHAT SETTING DOES YOUR MUSIC *TRULY* COME TO LIFE?
Vince once heard one of our songs whilst choosing between Fruit Loops and Frosties in the cereal aisle of an IGA. That was pretty cool.

IT'S 2012 AND THIS IS TUMBLR... WHAT'S ON YOUR MOODBOARD?
A busy city street in Saigon. David Bowie some time in 1976. Bubble baths. Some kind of Australian sheepdog running on the beach. Chocolate milk (alternative milk options appreciated).

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?
There is this one thing, actually, but we can only talk about it at shows... So maybe see you there?

Photo by Frankie Napier

GRXCE

SO, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
Jam: A tiny coastal town called Corindi Beach. Honestly the only things in that town were houses, the beach, a pub and a corner store.
Jono: Suburban Sydney. I lived super close to the Macquarie Centre so everything was close by. This made me believe that any drive close to 30 minutes was too long to endure.
Em: Newcastle. It's a coastal city trying to be the cool little sister to Sydney, built on the ashes of an industrial town.
Alex: Mortdale, in southwest Sydney. There isn't very much to do around here, but we must have the highest ratio of cafes to people in the whole world.

WHAT'S YOUR LATEST DROP?
Our latest release was our debut, Pretty Boy. Everyone should go and listen to it because firstly, it's a bop, and secondly, we all know at least one guy who thinks they're cool because they fit the "pretty boy" stereotype (you can dedicate this song to them and thank us later for a way to channel your angst).

HOW WOULD YOU SELL YOUR SOUND?
Alex: We're what you listen to when you want audio whiplash.

WHAT ARE THE GO-TO JAMS ON YOUR TOUR VAN PLAYLISTS?
Em: I'll force the band to listen to angsty femme punk (Body Type, VOIID, Porridge Radio) but we'll probably have been driving since the early hours of morning and the screaming will be too intense, so I'll settle for a crisp Talking Heads tune.

IN WHAT SETTING DOES YOUR MUSIC *TRULY* COME TO LIFE?
Jono: Around a fire, on a beach, with a group of mates, at dusk. It's the one place you will have no shame in dancing around or just lying down and taking it all in.

IT'S 2012 AND THIS IS TUMBLR... WHAT'S ON YOUR MOODBOARD?
Jam: I actually make Pinterest boards for each song we record, so if I were to include things off them, I'd say a disco ball, a swing set, polaroids, a wine bottle and an old candle.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?
Jono: Our differences make us stronger, together. We all have different backgrounds, grew up in different environments and have different views on everything. But I could not have picked a better team to work with.

Photo by Sammy Lee

JET CITY SPORTS CLUB

SO, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
We're all from around Sydney, but the band took shape in Redfern. The two best things about Redfern are the people and the train station. It's got a very rich history, and we're lucky to be living and writing in such an inspiring place.

WHAT'S YOUR LATEST DROP?
Our latest release is called 'Feeling It All', and it's for anyone who's ever missed someone they love. If you like big choruses and the blurred line between guitar music and pop, this might be the tune for you!

HOW WOULD YOU SELL YOUR SOUND?
I'd say it's fun and lighthearted, made by a bunch of best mates just trying to have a good time... That's convincing, right?

WHAT ARE THE GO-TO JAMS ON YOUR TOUR VAN PLAYLISTS?
Collectively we'd need Beach Bunny, Phoebe Bridgers, Julia Jacklin, Amyl And The Sniffers, Parkway Drive, The Smiths... The list goes on forever! We have some playlists on Spotify that you should check out.

IN WHAT SETTING DOES YOUR MUSIC *TRULY* COME TO LIFE?
We have a really cool turntable setup at home – it's always nice to have a few friends around, crack a bottle of wine and dig through some vinyl. I think the beauty of physical music is that it can be very communal, so as much as I like a walk with my headphones, I'll have to go with the "dinner party with mates" vibe.

IT'S 2012 AND THIS IS TUMBLR... WHAT'S ON YOUR MOODBOARD?
A Fender Jaguar. A flame in an empty room. A tour van in the middle of a dessert. Probably some lame quote over one of our album artworks – that was pretty, Tumblr right? And a microphone draped in flowers.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?
We're very thankful for everyone coming to our shows and buying out merch. We also absolutely love playing music together – we did 40 shows in 2022 and we don't plan on slowing down, and we owe that to everyone who has supported us so far.

Photo by Ruby Boland

SUNFRUITS

SO, WHERE ARE YOU FROM?
We're all based in Naarm (aka Melbourne), where we are super fortunate to have such a thriving music community. Being able to see a killer band on any given night in Naarm is genuinely such a blessing! We also have some of the best Banh Mis in town, which keep us fuelled to rock.

WHAT'S YOUR LATEST DROP?
We recently put out a new single titled 'Believe It All', which is our self-proclaimed hit of the summer. It puts a spotlight on our drummer, Gene Argiro, who takes the reigns vocally and sonically! There's also a sweet video to match, directed by Jack Ralph alongside Gene, featuring our dearest Our Carlson. You'll have to watch the video to see all the mischief we get up to with him and his top notch acting skills – truly a triple threat, I must say. So if you're up for a singalong or a dance, you might wanna check this one out right now?

HOW WOULD YOU SELL YOUR SOUND?
Hmm... Energetic psych garage pop with a dash of glam.

WHAT ARE THE GO-TO JAMS ON YOUR TOUR VAN PLAYLISTS?
We're all a mixed bag but love a singalong in the car at any given time. Recently on tour in Aotearoa, we've been revisiting some classics like Cheap Trick, Elton John, Carly Simon and Aretha Franklin, alongside some local icons such as Kosmetika, Twerps and Laura Jean – all confirmed must-haves in our tour van.

IN WHAT SETTING DOES YOUR MUSIC *TRULY* COME TO LIFE?
Maybe an impromptu living room dance party, at any time of the day, with some good mates. Because sharing music is always the best.

IT'S 2012 AND THIS IS TUMBLR... WHAT'S ON YOUR MOODBOARD?
Lots of hairspray, a good pair of flares, some eyeliner, an iced oat latte and a hot red Mustang.

WHAT ELSE SHOULD WE KNOW?
To keep an eye out for new music and a whole lotta touring.

Photo by Kalindy Williams

Photo: Ian Laidlaw

BEC STEVENS

HAILS FROM TYERRERNOTEPANNER/BEAUTY POINT, TASMANIA
PLAYS SOLO
SOUNDS LIKE SHARP AND SPIRITED POST-POISON CITY EMO
LATEST DROP *BIG WORRY* (LP OUT MARCH 17TH VIA DAMAGED)

How did you first discover the guitar?
My older brother, who I idolised, started learning it when I was super little and I just thought he was the coolest. When I turned about 11 or 12, he got a new guitar so I stole the shitty little nylon-string he'd been learning on and started to play. It was a solid year of me in primary school playing 'Smoke In The Water' – classic – in front of anyone who'd listen (probably just the dog).

I'll always consider my first real guitar to be a steel-string Tanglewood I got when I was 17. I got offered my first-ever paid show at my local pub and I was so excited, but I was dreading playing my ugly little nylon-string. My folks were stoked I was playing a paid show in front of people in an actual venue (after years of busking), so bless their hearts, they went and got me the Tanglewood so I'd have a hot new guitar for my first real show. The funniest part of this story is that I'd actually been sneaking into that pub underage for about six months – that's how I got the show.

What's your current go-to?
Almost always my Telecaster. I got my Squier '60s custom Tele when I was about 20. I loved the idea of playing an electric but I think because I was surrounded by gatekeeping men, I'd just told myself it was a "man's game" and couldn't play on (how sad). But I remember being in a guitar shop one day and I was daydreaming about all the guitars in there, and then... I saw her. I think the old music dudes that worked there loved that I wanted to get it, so they gave be a mad discount. I've been playing that Tele ever since. She gets it right every time, and she suits my sound and playing style.

Who and/or what are your main influences?
I get a lot of inspiration from acts like The Menzingers, Hole, Ceres and Kathleen Hana – and for a big swing in the other direction, people like Kathleen Edwards, Phoebe Bridgers, Liz Stringer and Mia Dyson. Thematically, my music revolves a lot around trying to evoke certain feelings and memories, and I've got a lot of heavy stuff in my life that I write about, so I draw a lot from that when I'm trying to write guitar parts. Mood and tone are so important.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
I'd love to lie and say 'yes' and list off an abundance of cool niche pedals, but it would certainly be a fib. Not that I don't appreciate all that stuff, I'm just still learning as I have the attention span of a peanut. Being a full-time broke girl, all the pedals I have are second-hand ones that I've bought from mates.

What advice would you give your past self?
Pay attention! I started learning guitar when I was young. I had always sung, and thanks to my folks, been into music and songwriting from a young age. When I started learning guitar, I just wanted to be able to play something while I sang, so once I learnt some basic chords and tab-reading skills, I would just learn how to play every song I wanted to cover. But I didn't stick to practicing and getting better. If I had the attention span back then (and now), I could be a far more competent and confident guitarist. It's definitely not too late for me to get better and hone in on strengthening my skills, but wow, I am just so good at not practicing...

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive, who would it be?
Knowing that I am not the best guitarist, this sounds like a thing of nightmares – I hope I never have to do that. There are definitely a few guitarists I idolise, though, who I'd be chuffed to even hold a guitar in the same room as – Sulynn Hago from Propagandhi being one of them. God, they shred so hard. I used to watch their covers of Prop *songs* before they got asked to be in the band – iconic. Their skill and style are something I'd kill to have.

Photo: Seamus Platt

HOPE DEFTEROS

HAILS FROM MEANJIN/BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND
PLAYS SOLO (AS HOPE D)
SOUNDS LIKE ENERGISED ALT-POP PRIMED FOR PRE-DRINKS
LATEST DROP *CLASH OF THE SUBSTANCE* (LP OUT FEBRUARY 10TH)

How did you first discover the guitar?
When I was about six years old, my dad bought me a little Barbie guitar, which I played heaps and taught myself chords on, until I realised it'd never been tuned – I was playing in a tuning that didn't exist. After tuning it properly and re-teaching myself, I finally took lessons in year six as a way to get out of playing compulsory violin at school. But I also had a huge passion for it, and never had to be forced to practise.

What's your current go-to?
My current guitar is a Fender Acoustasonic. When I started playing live with a band, I needed an acoustic guitar and an electric, but my laziness made me search for something that could do both. It's a great guitar, and I bought it with my cover gig money in early 2020. I've loved it ever since – it can make some sick sounds, and it's so nice just taking one guitar to a gig.

Who and/or what are your main influences?
When I started playing, my main influences were Ed Sheeran, Hozier and Tash Sultana – nice-sounding chords with storytelling lyrics to accompany. But live looping as a cover artist allowed me to create scenic and atmospheric sounds that reflected on where I was. I would be at a beautiful cafe at Graceville in Meanjin, and loop songs depending on the weather outside – melancholy for cloudy vibes, and upbeat major chords and riffs when it was sunny. This is how I create my riffs and melodies for a lot of my own songs, too! Whatever the stories are saying through my lyrics, the guitar will reflect it.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
I have swapped and bought and sold heaps of pedals since I first started getting into them. I once had an Electro-Harmonix SYNTH9 – that was so fun and I wish I did more with it! I have a Boss [PS-6 Harmonist] that allows me to make some uncomfortable rising pitch sounds. I'm a bit obsessed with the [Pro Co] RAT at the moment, too. Also my [Electro-Harmonix] POG2 is so sick for low bass harmony sounds, but I need to learn to use it properly...

Do you have any 'white whales'?
Nothing really in particular! I've been in my domestic Acoustasonic bubble. I have my Tele, too, so if anything I would froth a crazy coloured Strat or Jazzmaster. The LAVA ME acoustic guitars also seem so cool, I would love to own one one day.

What would your signature model look like?
It would be a Telecaster-looking body with five pickups and a built-in chorus/reverb switch. The design would be colourful chaos, like the cover of my album *Clash Of The Substance*. I can't talk too much about the spec –, just whatever my guitars do now, but with some crazy, colourful designs.

What advice would you give your past self?
Continue the self-teaching! Lessons were good, but I think the path I started on was more beneficial – discovering things myself with happy accidents. That being said, I wish I'd learned Jazz guitar when I first started, because then I feel like my solos would be more deliberate and intentional instead of random (but that's cool too). And just playing and learning what you love to listen to!

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive, who would it be?
Tiare Kelly, Benee's guitarist. I think they're so freaking sick. I've seen them play a few times and I am always in awe. I would love to jam to 'Afterlife' by Benee – I played it throughout COVID and it's a sentimental song to me. But I would just froth being in their presence in general. Otherwise it'd be Tash Sultana and we'd jam to 'Notion', one of my favourites from them!

Photo: Pip

HUGO SILVANI

HAILS FROM MANCHESTER, ENGLAND
PLAYS IN PALE WAVES
SOUNDS LIKE AN ANGSTY CHASM OF '00S EMO AND BRITPOP
LATEST DROP *UNWANTED* (LP OUT NOW VIA DIRTY HIT + AUSTRALIAN TOUR IN MARCH)

How did you first discover the guitar?
My older brother had started playing the guitar and naturally I wanted to copy him. I think I was about ten at the time, and I got a gear4music acoustic for Christmas.

What's your current go-to?
That's a tough one! I like to use different guitars depending on the purpose! However, right now I'd say it's my custom-built Heritage Core H-150. I think the fact that it was built for me makes it extra special – not to mention how massive it sounds.

Who and/or what are your main influences?
Honestly, this is constantly changing with the music I'm listening to and experiences I'm having. Right now, I'm trying my best to almost unlearn what I naturally do – certain chord sequences, tones, etcetera... For me, it's important to challenge that.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
I actually have a tonne of pedals! A recent favourite of mine would be the Funny Little Boxes 1991. But very recently I switched to a Kemper for live purposes, for ease of use and consistency.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
My gear4music acoustic! I think my brother took it to university and left it in his house when he moved out. I'm not joking, it sounded incredible.

What would your signature model look like?
I'd probably try to create a Frankenstein – something between a Strat and Les Paul with those self-tuning pegs so I never have to tune it again... But now that I say it, that sounds horrible.

What advice would you give your past self?
If possible, record yourself and listen back. It can be daunting, but it will really help you identify the weaknesses in your playing.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive, who would it be?
I'm going to say Nile Rodgers. He seems like a really nice guy. I'd get him to teach me 'We Are Family'.

Photo: Celina Kenyon

TONY PERRY

HAILS FROM TIJUANA, MEXICO
PLAYS IN PIERCE THE VEIL
SOUNDS LIKE CRUNCHY, MELODICALLY CHARGED MOSH-POP
LATEST DROP *THE JAWS OF LIFE* (LP OUT FEBRUARY 10TH VIA FEARLESS)

How did you first discover the guitar?
It was kind of an accident. I set out wanting to play drums, and I had a super cheap drum set – I was maybe 12 years old at the time – but it just wasn't something I was able to keep up with. But a lot of my friends had picked up the guitar, so I'd go to their houses and see them playing something, and I'd be like, "How do you do that!?" I learned to play for a while before I was able to get my own.

What's your current go-to?
Right now I have an arsenal of Stratocasters – they're Fender Jim Root Strats, all mahogany body with the dual humbuckers and a nice, fast compound-radius neck. I've made a few changes to them, to kind of make them work a little bit better for what I do, but overall they're just great guitars out of the box. So not a whole lot of changes. I'd played Gibsons and ESPs for a while, and when I started talking to Fender about playing their guitars, I didn't really know what would suit me. It took a long time to narrow down what worked, but then I finally tried one of these and it ended up being perfect.

Who and/or what are your main influences?
I was into a lot of punk stuff growing up. I started with pop punk, then a lot of SoCal punk bands and things like that. But when that whole metalcore movement happened, when I was in high school, I really latched on to that, and it all kind of grew from there. There was also that the boon with post-hardcore bands – Thrice was a huge one, and then being in San Diego, our hometown heroes were As I Lay Dying.

Are you much of a gear nerd?
Yeah, to an extent. The more gear I get into, though, the more I've been into the new digital stuff. So I was big into the Kemper for a long time, and then right before we started touring again last year, I got a Neural Quad Cortex, and that's been like my new toy.

Do you have any 'white whales'?
I would like a Les Paul Custom. There's a year range – I think it was the late '70s or early '80s – where they were doing them with maple necks. I've been wanting to find one of those, but not enough to the point where I've actually tried. Because I'm sure they're out there; I bet if I spent some time on Reverb I could figure out where to find one.

What would your signature model look like?
That question! I think about that all the time. It would definitely be something with Fender, and to be honest, I'd probably end up stealing a lot of specs from Jim Root's guitar. I've done a signature once and I did the slime design, and I have a black-and-white version of that that never really came to life. So maybe I'll do something with that – the white drip design on some type of Fender body shape – that could be fun.

What advice would you give your past self?
I would definitely tell myself to not only listen to one genre of music, because I think broadening my tastes was the first step towards being able to play more difficult things, or being able to expand on my skillset – things I wouldn't have picked up from the bands I was listening to at the time. But there's something great about punk where you can learn a power chord and then start making up your own songs. Then you can go start a garage band and start making things work. That accessibility is awesome.

If you could jam with any guitarist, dead or alive, who would it be?
The first thing I ever learned, before I even owned a guitar, was the intro to 'Dammit' by Blink-182. So I think having a hang and playing some guitar with those guys would be really cool.

BRING ME THE HORIZON

GOOD THINGS FESTIVAL

WHERE FLEMINGTON RACECOURSE NAARM/MELBOURNE, VICTORIA | **WHEN** FRIDAY DECEMBER 2ND, 2022 | **REVIEW** ELLIE ROBINSON | **PHOTOS** BRITT ANDREWS

Of all the smaller rock and metal festivals to crop up in this post-Soundwave landscape, none have come as close to matching that uniquely youthful, colour-drenched and adrenalised atmosphere as Good Things (which makes sense; organised by much of its alumni, it's more or less a spiritual successor to Soundwave). Having been sidelined for the past three years – y'know, for obvious reasons – the festival made its grand return to Flemington Racecourse on Friday December 2nd, sporting a lineup that more than made up for its forced hiatus (even if a handful of the acts billed had to ditch it at the last second due to visa problems).

Walking through the gates – our free (and duly appreciated) Red Bull gripped tightly – elation bounded through the festival site. Early-rising daredevils yelped with excited terror from the carnival lines, while others made sure the merch lines were consistently brutal from the moment they started. The site itself, too, was lined with a rainbow of food trucks doling out every cuisine imaginable – easily the best spread we'd ever seen at a music festival, even taking into account those that explicitly brand themselves as foodie-centric.

Opening up the mainstage were **Teenage Joans**. We've been following the Kaurna-native pop-punkers since their first upload to Triple J Unearthed, so to see them tear it up on such a massive stage – with an aptly massive crowd to boot – felt unexpectedly emotional. They absolutely crushed their 30-minute showcase, the highlights being two as-yet-unreleased cuts from their impending debut album, *Hospital Bed*, that poked at a more abrasive, genre-bending pop-punk sound à la Yungblud and classic Green Day. Also worthy of note was the duo's cover of Charli XCX's 'Vroom Vroom', which they spun into an effortless '90s punk rager (Cahli, Tahlia, if either of you are reading this, we need a recorded version of it *yesterday*).

Equally emotive was the hotly awaited return of **Kisschasy**, newly reunited to perform their seminal debut album, 2005's *United Paper People*, in its entirety. Part of that emotion came courtesy of the record itself, with stirring ballads like 'Black Dress' and 'Hearing Voices Tonight' having shed none of their poignancy after 17 years. But more came from the band, who looked a little greyer than we'd last seen them (in 2015), but also much happier; the side of the stage was flanked with toddlers (theirs, presumably – *hopefully*), whose white-hot dance moves evoked louder cheers than their dads' spirited jamming. And on the ground, us elder emos instantly snapped back to our halcyon days, belting along to all the doughy, saccharine hooks like they (or we) hadn't aged a day.

Kisschasy weren't the only band at Good Things playing the nostalgia card, but for the next few hours, our focus was locked squarely on the bands blazing trails *today*. One of those, tailing Kisschasy on the

TISM

NOFX

GOJIRA

stage adjacent to them, is **Thornhill**. Heavy on cuts from this year's brooding and industrial *Heroine* album, the energy of their set assailed its sunny framing, dark and gothic with Jacob Charlton's swaggering tenor gliding over the barbed riffs that Ethan McCann dextrously flung at him. It was immediately made clear that Thornhill are not a "festival band" – that their ambitious sonic palette and aesthetic blueprint is only fully realised at their own shows – but even with the limitations imposed, they delivered a truly riveting performance.

Over on Stage 5 (see: the obligatory "small stage" tucked away at the furthermost corner of the festival site), technical difficulties wreaked havoc, leading to an otherwise meticulous schedule being thrown into disarray. While at most other festivals, bands would bear the brunt of this with shortened sets and rushed changeovers, Good Things proved to a lot more lax – **Ocean Grove** took to the stage around 20 minutes late, but played for the full half-hour they were billed with.

Two thirds of their setlist was pulled from 2020's *Flip Phone Fantasy* album, which had us feeling conflicted: the bangers were plentiful and the pit was indeed poppin' (especially when the band whipped out vibe-heavy gems like 'Guys From The Gord' and 'Junkie$') but this year's *Up In The Air Forever* album is equally laden with fezzie-primed anthems, and bar singles 'Cali Sun' and 'Sex Dope Gold', it was totally snubbed. Nevertheless, Ocean Grove most definitely *are* a festival band, and their Good Things set made us all the more certain of that. With more and more festivals shedding themselves of any genre-centric constraints, we can easily see them popping up on more lineups in the near future – something we have absolutely no qualms about.

The biggest downside of the schedule's shift was that many punters missed the best performance of the day, from the genre-bending force that is **Nova Twins.** Fresh off the jet from London, the pair tore through their set of colourful punk-hop scorchers with vicious and infectiously buoyant aplomb, uniting the festival's most diverse (and fashionable) crowd for a riotous celebration of individuality. At no point during the performance could we anticipate Nova Twins' next move: while singer and guitarist Amy Love shredded on her Mustang like her life depended on it, bassist Georgia South was tap-dancing on her pedalboard – and utilising a Hot Hand MIDI ring (a f***ing game-changer if we've ever seen one) – to deliver analogue bass drops in the vein of *In Silico*-era Pendulum.

Equally spellbinding were **TISM**, another act for those of us with nostalgic tastes and, clad in shimmering silver mylar jumpsuits (with enormous helium balloons protruding from their heads), by far the festival's most visually striking. Officially reunited after 18 long, painful years, the band did well to remind us exactly why they were such a cultural powerhouse in their heyday, blazing through a stacked catalogue of hits like 'Whatareya?', 'Greg! The Stop Sign!!' and '(He'll Never Be An) Ol' Man River'. Amid all the raw comedy and visual gags, it was almost surprising just how great the band sounded on their own merits – Ron Hitler-Barassi's pipes were in tip-top shape, and new guitarist Vladimir Lenin-McCartney downright stunned with his Tele in clutch.

NOFX recently announced that 2023 would be their last year as an active touring band, so their late-arvo set was one of the most highly anticipated. Not only was it likely the last-ever time the punk legends would perform in Melbourne, but it was also their second time ever playing *Punk In Drublic* in its entirety. That part, the band were clearly less stoked than us about, making several quips about their lack of enthusiasm as the hour unfolded. They got the job done, though, riffing through deep cuts like 'Fleas', 'Happy Guy' and 'Dig' for the first time in some eight years, and throwing in a couple of bonus treats like *First Ditch Effort* highlight 'Six Years On Dope' and a cover of Mark Curry's 'Perfect Government'.

Visibly disgruntled yet still putting on a ripper show, NOFX were the inverse of **Deftones**. The latter alt-metal pioneers thrashed with visceral passion – Stephen Carpenter in particular, laying waste to his fretboard with the meticulous tact other players would sell their souls for – and although Chino Moreno's energy waned quickly, he powered through fatigue to deliver a vocal performance nothing short of transcendental. But with a combination of his nonexistent stage presence, the occasional rhythmic hiccup and a godawful mix, their set overall was a bit of a mess. The lattermost gripe was our biggest – even standing just a dozen or so metres from the stage, Deftones' sound was muddy and washed out, lyrics barely comprehensible under the avalanche of compression.

Those aural quandaries only worsened for **Bring Me The Horizon,** whose headlining set was entirely derailed by a mix we can only describe aptly as *dogshit*. Punters whispering to their friends sounded more coherent, with the band's two Matts – drummer Nicholls and bassist Kean – being the only members spotlit in our corner of the soundscape (just right of the mixing desk, where the sound is supposed to be at its sharpest). We hardly caught a minute of Oli Sykes' actual vocals, with the frontman completely drowned out by his chanting disciples; this wound up being one of our highlights, though, as rapturous singalongs to hits like 'Happy Song' and 'Shadow Moses' brought to our cluster of the crowd a poignant sense of community.

The setlist as a whole drew exclusively of the newer half of Bring Me The Horizon's catalogue, with the oldest tracks coming from 2013's 'Sempiternal'. It celebrated the band's recent foray into industrial experimentalism, delivered as a conceptual play-of-sorts flanked by *Matrix*-inspired interludes and visual accoutrements. 'Die4U' and 'Strangers' were highlights, hinting at a bright future for Sykes and co. as they put the finishing touches on their second *Post Human* record. They treated us to five songs from the first chapter (*Survival Horror*), too, with the one-two punch of 'Dear Diary' and 'Parasite Eve' landing with particular force. As much as their sound team cooked it, we must admit, we still had a blast watching Bring Me The Horizon close out a stellar day of live music.

Before we could even make it back out the gates, hype for Good Things '23 was abuzz. This edition offered one of the best festival experiences we've had in years, thanks in no short part to its nigh-on perfect lineup and exceptional organisation (bar the last two sets' awful production and the technical mishaps on Stage 5). We have countless suggestions for the next bill – Paramore, Willow, Turnstile, Drug Church, The Linda Lindas and PUP would all be sick, please and thanks – but as it stands, and especially after Good Things '22, we're confident that whatever the team whip up will have us giddier than Kisschasy's kids.

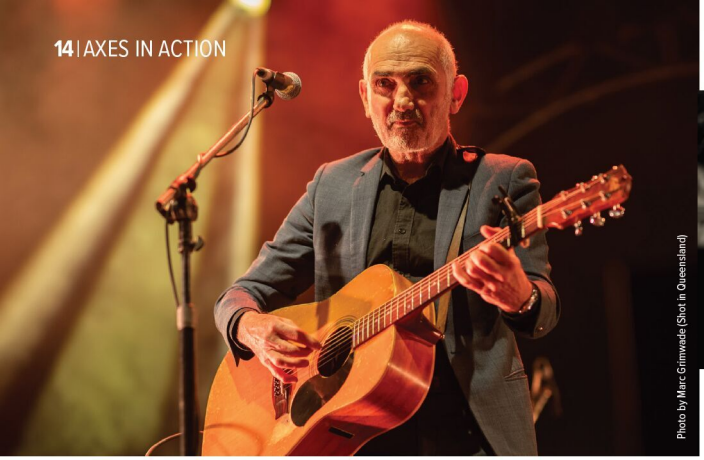

Photo by Marc Grimwade (Shot in Queensland)

Photo by Dave Simpson (shot in Auckland, New Zealand)

PAUL KELLY'S "MAKING GRAVY"

WHERE SIDNEY MYER MUSIC BOWL NAARM/MELBOURNE, VIC | **WHEN** FRIDAY DECEMBER 9TH, 2022 | **REVIEW** ELLIE ROBINSON

It's a testament to Paul Kelly's ever-strengthening legacy that every holiday season, more than 10,000 Melbournites convene for a mini-festival based on a singular track he dropped in 1996. 'How To Make Gravy' is one of the most iconic tunes in Australian rock history – a little surprising when you consider its runtime (a scratch over five minutes), thematic basis (a melancholic letter penned by a prisoner) and structure (seven verses, no chorus) – and Kelly himself has long embraced this; for him, it offers a rare chance to unite the country and celebrate the good in us all, regardless of age, gender, social status or political leanings.

Walking into the Sidney Myer Music Bowl for this year's Making Gravy, that was immediately evident: about half of the crowd looked to be in the over-fifties range, but most came with full families – grandkids and all – in tow. There were pruny old cobbers in tattered hi-viz bumping shoulders with baby-faced leftists wearing their pronoun pins with pride (as they damn well should). Hammer-and-sickle pins on messenger bags brushed past battle flannos embroidered with colonialist Australian flags. Anywhere else, this congregation of polar opposites would surely end in bloodshed – so stirring is the power of Paul Kelly, a true national treasure.

This year, Kelly's self-curated lineup favoured the new generation of Australian (and Kiwi) rockers, starting with the luminous indie-folk talents of Alex The Astronaut. Bubbly and bright, Alex Lynn thrived in the stately amphitheatre, making full use of its boomy acoustics with her crisp acoustic strumming and spirited, saccharine tenor.

She and her band played early in the evening, bathed in a summery glow; to suit, their setlist erred on the lighter side of Lynn's catalogue – highlights included the grandiose 'Growing Up' and euphoric 'Haircut' from her recent second album, How To Grow A Sunflower Underwater – though a raw, poignant acoustic rendition of 'I Like To Dance' (a gut-wrenching song about domestic abuse) grounded her performance with a striking gravitas. By now it's far surpassed cliché to compare Lynn to Kelly – but if any one artist has the zest and passion needed to succeed the latter in Australia's pantheon of folk-rock icons, it's her.

Riding the high of Lynn's infectious buoyancy, The Beths wasted no time whipping out their catchiest and most energetic jams. The pop-rock stalwarts made the trek from Auckland just for this set, so naturally they gave it 110 percent: Jonathan Pierce tore through every solo with an impassioned ferocity unmatched by his peers, while Liz Stokes underscored his punchy leads with gooey, brain-tickling rhythms. Her vocals, too, soared over the sun-kissed hills, every line grippingly soulful and flecked with her Kiwi-accented tweeness.

As far as their Australian touring goes, this year saw The Beths graduate from clubs to theatres; tonight, though, they made it clear they're all too ready to dominate arenas. They certainly have our backing – especially if they end every set (regardless of season) on that downright ripping cover of 'Have Yourself A Merry Little Christmas'.

It kind of goes without saying that Amyl And The Sniffers belong on these giant, larger-than-life stages: they play rough and scuzzy, nosebleed-y pub-punk, but they're popstars at heart, eating up their fans' adoration as they tear through riffs and thrash around like rabid kangaroos. On the hill, they had a group of toddlers whipped into a frenzy, parents watching proudly as their lil' tikes instinctively broke out into a circle pit. The geriatric among us, however, seemed appalled by the band's self-submerged depravity, sneering as Amy Taylor tore off items of clothing between angular hook-swings of vocal carnage.

For the rest of us, Amyl And The Sniffers' set was nothing short of intoxicating – they gave the evening a welcomed boost of adrenaline, duly hyping us right up for the main show from Paul Kelly and co. Looking fly as hell in their three-piece suits, the 68-year-old and his backing band had spirits high from the second they launched into 'Maybe This Christmas' (for which they were joined by Alice Keath). Kelly himself masterfully wielded an acoustic guitar, adding a tasteful prickliness to the electric warmth doled out by his nephew Dan and the inimitable J. Walker.

Keath returned about 30 minutes later, joining the band – as well as Jessica Hitchcock – for a spin on Kelly's 1999 team-up with Uncle Bill, 'Our Sunshine'. It was one of 17 songs in the set to feature Hitchcock's enchanting vocals, with other gems including the time-honoured 'Silent Night' (where she, Kelly and the gang were also joined by Sime Nugent), a rollicking cover of The Drifters' 'Save The Last Dance For Me', and a rendition of 'Dumb Things' that came with some of the loudest singalongs we've heard in quite some time.

Hitchcock also sung lead vocals on 'Banks Of The Ohio' (another cut to feature Keath as well) and a cover of the late Judith Durham's 'The Carnival Is Over' – the latter was naturally sung in tribute to the fallen icon, while the former came in memory of Olivia Newton John. There were other dedications strewn throughout the set: Kelly kicked off his first encore solo by shouting 'Every Step Of The Way' out to Eddie Betts (who was in the audience), about a dozen songs after he dedicated a heartrending solo performance of 'Rally Round The Drum' to the late Archie Roach.

Perhaps the biggest moment of the night came when Kelly ended his first set with 'From Little Things Big Things Grow'. In addition to Hitchcock and Keath, he was joined by Alex Lynn, Russell Keith (who stole the show with his soulful work on the didgeridoo) and all four of The Beths – it was a huge, life-affirming celebration of camaraderie and live music, and a moment we aren't likely to forget any time soon. But the same can be said for all of Kelly's set – a career-spanning showcase of his most enrapturing hits – and the three sets that came before his.

All in all, Making Gravy '22 set a huge bar for Kelly to top with next year's edition. But if it's even ten percent as great as this year's was, there's no doubt we'll leave it with ear-to-ear smiles glued to our faces.

Photo by Matt Jeonek (shot in Fremantle)

THE KILLERS

WHERE ROD LAVER ARENA, NAARM/MELBOURNE, VIC | **WHEN** DEC 13TH, 2022 | **REVIEW** ELLIE ROBINSON | **PHOTOS** CHRIS PHELPS

A lot has happened since early 2020, when The Killers announced their latest tour of Australia. Not only did the Vegas-native pop-rock icons release their sixth album, *Imploding The Mirage*, that August, they followed it up with a seventh – the nostalgic concept album *Pressure Machine* – just a year later. The tour was initially set to go down in November of 2020, hot on the heels of that year's drop – but for obvious reasons, that didn't quite pan out. The obvious answer, then, would've been to cut their losses on *Imploding The Mirage* and, when borders opened (and big arena concerts were made legal) once more, head out on a tour to plug *Pressure Machine*.

The Killers aren't a very obvious band, though. So when they finally made the trip Down Under in December of 2022, they did so with *Imploding The Mirage* front-and-centre. Only in Brisbane did they play more than one song from *Pressure Machine* – all 12 of the setlists, though, were heavy on *Imploding The Mirage*. At the first of their two Melbourne shows, the latter album was only usurped in representation by The Killers' 2004 debut, *Hot Fuss*, from which five of the set's 21 tracks were pulled. This was expected and honestly welcomed: as strong as the band's talents have remained over the past two decades, those earlier cuts are legitimate classics; for better or worse, 'Somebody Told Me' and 'Mr. Brightside' will always be The Killers' biggest hits.

As a whole, the setlist ebbed and flowed sweetly from triumphant highs to simmering lows; songs like 'When You Were Young' and 'Smile Like You Mean It' opened the show with spirit and zest, before the mood was mellowed out by the more reflective 'Shot At The Night' and smoky, '80s-channelling 'Running Towards A Place'. We arced back up to a new peak with the masterful leap from 'Human' to 'Spaceman' into 'Somebody Told Me', then floated down once more with 'Cody' (our sole taste of *Pressure Machine*), 'Boy' (a stellar preview of The Killers' impending eighth album) and 'A Dustland Fairytale' (aka the most underrated song in their entire catalogue).

Perhaps the boldest tonal shift came during the band's encore, where 'The Man' and 'Bling' teased out The Killers' darker, more enigmatic and hubristic sides, before 'Mr. Brightside' – tripled in length with a shimmery dance intro and grandiose drum/guitar solos – snapped us right back to the ultra-bright eruption of energy that we started with.

After so many years of smashing through milestones and consistently one-upping themselves, the band have refined their live show into something almost uncannily perfect: less like a well-oiled machine in motion, and more like a CGI demo of it, smooth and tight and meticulously considered. This would normally sour appetites – the spirit of live music, after all, is innate humanity and unpredictability – but The Killers' bright and buoyant penchant for theatrics, larger-than-life personalities and soaring pop-rock anthems (the kind jukebox musicals were invented to embrace) are what make them truly unique. The band's two-hour show blurred the line between concert and play and beautifully so. We do, however, have to wonder if they really needed four separate blasts of rainbow confetti.

At the core of it all was frontman Brandon Flowers, who shone with a showy swagger and captivating charm – somewhere between Elvis Presley, Freddie Mercury and Jon Bon Jovi. He's long embraced a dramatised flair and lust for the spotlight, but here it seemed like he'd finally become that character and not simply portrayed him. There's no shock there: Flowers was born and raised in Las Vegas, and at 41 today, he's a Christian father to three kids – were this the '50s, he'd be a veritable rock'n'roll god. He slunk freely around the stage at Rod Laver Arena, frequently stopping in tracks to clock fans in the bleachers and offer neighbourly waves. Though he relished the attention, there was no cockiness – from word 'go', Flowers ensured he and the crowd were on the same euphoric, neon-tinged wavelength.

As for the rest of the band, it's stunning that Ted Sablay is still lumped with the lesser title of "touring" guitarist. Not only has he been with The Killers (in various roles) since 2006, but as he proved in Melbourne, he's the most essential piece of the puzzle; every soaring solo and devilish lick was played with walloping conviction, as though he was personally auditioning for a spot among the all-times greats. Rock solid, too, was his chemistry with longstanding axeman Dave Keuning, whose fiery hooks and buttery rhythms served as a magical fold to Flowers' quixotic singing. Sablay and Keuning were occasionally joined by Robbie Connolly and/or Taylor Milne, but the latter two touring members mostly kept stock of the keys and synths that fleshed out the mix; as a full unit, The Killers really pushed the limits of Rod Laver's sound processing systems.

By the night's end, it'd become hard to envision a future where The Killers progress – the balance of old and new material, their chemistry blending youthful exuberance with deliberated maturity, the way they honoured each of their eras without snubbing or getting too wrapped up in any... This really does feel like The Killers' peak. That being said, of course, they could play 20 minutes in a dive bar and we'd probably leave elated. Whatever the future has in store, The Killers' live show has never been so memorable, and tonight's most certainly stood as the best they've played on local shores.

SETLIST

1. My Soul's Own Warning
2. Enterlude
3. When You Were Young
4. Jenny Was A Friend Of Mine
5. Smile Like You Mean It
6. Shot At The Night
7. Running Towards A Place
8. Human
9. Spaceman
10. Somebody Told Me
11. Cody
12. Boy
13. A Dustland Fairytale
14. Runaways
15. Read My Mind
16. Dying Breed
17. Caution
18. All These Things That I've Done

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19. The Man
20. Bling (Confession Of A King)
21. Mr. Brightside

ENTER SHIKARI

WHERE THE FORUM NAARM/MELBOURNE, VICTORIA | **WHEN** FRIDAY NOVEMBER 11TH, 2022 | **REVIEW** ELLIE ROBINSON

PHOTOS ROBERTO RICCIUTI (SHOT IN EDINBURGH, SCOTLAND)

You'd be hard-pressed to find a band that wasn't stung by the pandemic, but Enter Shikari were dealt an especially dull hand: their sixth album, *Nothing Is True & Everything Is Possible*, marked a bold and boisterous return to form, drawing from all five of their previous eras – from the grisly, glitch-infected metalcore of *Take To The Skies* (2007), to the shimmery dance-pop of *The Spark* (2017) – and distilling them into the ultimate form of Enter Shikari.

It was their most ambitious effort, intended to be launched with their most ambitious live show; the band slaved away on both for two years until the album was announced... In February of 2020.

COVID-19 came scarily close to spelling the end of Enter Shikari. But never ones to cower in the face of adversity, they soldiered on and made an explosive live return at the Download Pilot festival in June '21. According to frontman Rou Reynolds, that gig saved the band and cemented their future – one that involved touring internationally as soon as physically possible. And of course, high on the bucket list would be a trek Down Under.

For their first Melbourne show in three years, the band employed a kaleidoscope of strobe lights, melting some 2,000 minds in tandem with a visual translation of their last album's unhinged energy. But try as they might to blind us with lasers, all eyes were fixed squarely on Reynolds for the bulk of the set; even the more balladesque moments saw him whip around the Forum stage in a frenzy, adrenalised and fiercely keen to spur chaos in the pits.

This never came at the expense of his performance, though: every line he sung and screamed came with virulent conviction, stabbing through a cluttered mix like Reynolds' life depended on it. He especially shone towards the end of the night, climbing amps and bars and snaking from the front of the pit to the foyer as he roared through 'Mothership' and 'Solidarity'.

Grounding him were guitarist Rory Clewlow and bassist Chris Batten, who steered the show with tight and considered, yet impenitently savage attacks on their respective fretboards. Clewlow's talents were notably impressive, given his mammoth task of holding down the riffs in a set driven primarily by them, without a lick of assistance. Batten's belting basswork brought a bewitching boominess to the brouhaha (sorry), elevating the shreddy fare with oodles of sonic molasses.

They gelled ravishingly with the synth-based elements that coloured in the mix, never taking away from the impact its stitched-in tracks were there to dole to us, and conversely never playing second fiddle to their Kempers. And of course drummer Rob Rolfe, manic and mettled as always, kept us duly stunned by his impassioned thrashing.

With their powers combined, Enter Shikari tore through a solid 80 minutes of material. Their setlist left a bit to be desired, though. For starters, only five songs from *Nothing Is True* made the cut – all but lead single 'The Dreamer's Hotel' being lumped into the first half of the set – and although 'Modern Living' and 'The Pressure's On' are both stellar tracks, they felt like odd choices for a live set when the band could have swung instead for the energised fervour of 'TINA', triumphant howls of 'The King' or walloping danciness of 'Crossing The Rubicon'.

Grating, too, was the sole cut from *The Mindsweep* (2015) being 'Anaesthetist' – one of the weakest songs on an otherwise brilliant album – stretched out beyond tedium with the tired and trite Reso remix (a cool little switch-up in 2016, but annoyingly overplayed six years later).

All of these gripes on missed opportunities, though, were negated by the strength of what Enter Shikari did perform. Deep-cut delights like 'Destabilise' and 'The Paddington Frisk' were enormous highlights, the latter especially so with its blistering drums and convulsive, hardcore-channelling riffs. A cover of David Bowie's 'Heroes', too, kicked the band's encore off with a striking moment of poignancy, as Reynolds tapped into a side of his artistry seen rarely in Enter Shikari's own efforts.

Then there were all the deafening singalongs fostered by the band's earlier works: the epic 'Juggernauts' and the Myspace-era classic 'Sorry, You're Not A Winner' (clap-clap-claps and all), as well as the one-two punch of anarchic nostalgia we closed on with 'Mothership' and 'Solidarity'. That "ending", too, contrasted beautifully with the band's encore, rounded out by 'The Dreamer's Hotel' and *The Spark* highlight 'Live Outside', which showed that even after six albums and 20-plus years of thrashing up a storm, Enter Shikari are still one of a kind.

The band's seventh album will be released in the first half of 2023 (keep an eye out for our feature on it in Australian Guitar #153). Hopefully, that means another Australian tour on the cards sooner than later.

SETLIST

1. The Great Unknown
2. Destabilise
3. Juggernauts
4. Modern Living
5. Anaesthetist (w/ Reso remix)
6. Satellites
7. The Pressure's On
8. Arguing With Thermometers
9. Rabble Rouser
10. Sorry, You're Not A Winner
11. The Void Stares Back
12. The Paddington Frisk
13. Gandhi Mate, Gandhi
14. Mothership
15. Solidarity

———————

16. Heroes (David Bowie cover)
17. The Dreamer's Hotel
18. Live Outside

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...WHERE THE HEART IS

KINGSWOOD OPEN UP ON THE CONCEPTUAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THEIR NEW ALBUM, *HOME*, AND HOW IT TIES IN TO THEIR BIGGEST-EVER NATIONAL TOUR.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON.** PHOTO BY **CASSANDRA HANNAGAN.**

There was once a time, decades ago, when most reputable Australian rock bands would embark on months-long tours of the country, with itineraries sprawling far beyond the standard fare of the east coast hotspots and a few other capitals (if the promoter's feeling generous). This partially came down to necessity: music wasn't as widely accessible as it is now with streaming and social media, and heading to a gig was one of the only ways you could really engage in a band's fandom. For the artists themselves, too, touring was a *lot* cheaper in the '70s, '80s and '90s than it is now.

There are some artists that still insist on doing those insanely stacked road tours, but most aren't your typical FM radio fare. Cue the Triple J darlings and theatre-packing indie-rockers in Kingswood, whose *Hometowns* tour – which is currently underway, but will continue well into the last few months of 2023 – will, when all is said and done, be the biggest tour in Australian music history (with around 120 shows lined up altogether). They're undertaking the trek in a purpose-built tour bus, whacked together by the band themselves over the second half of last year, and they're playing in virtually every town across Australia with a stage for them to play.

It comes on the back of their fourth studio album, *Home*, which is set to land at the end of February as Kingswood's first independent effort. The tour's ambitious concept is paradoxically linked to the album's looseness – a longing for "home" as both a literal place and an idea. To explore how both concepts intertwine, *Australian Guitar* caught up with frontman Fergus Linacre and guitarist Alex Laska.

With the significance of this tour and the emotional weight behind it, does that kind of tie into the meaning of this new record's title?

Linacre: Yeah, certainly. That kind of revealed itself afterwards – we didn't write the album with the idea that it was going to be called *Home*, but it definitely deals with those themes: questioning what is important to you, or what "home" means. And "home" doesn't have to be a place – "home" can be traveling around, or it can be the people you're with... I think the title sort of just came as the perfect way to sum up what this album is about. It's about travelling, missing things and loving things, searching for meaning and reason, dealing with grief... A lot of things that circle back to the notion of "home".

Laska: It's also very musically grounded. Bands always have a trajectory, right? As soon as you start out, you know, from the moment of inception, you'll have all these grand ideas for what your band going to be and how it's going to be presented. And from the point of inception to the point that it manifests – when it finally comes to fruition and your band *exists* – all of that time is used to develop your first release. And you've got all the time in the world for that because you set the terms, but let's say there's a marker of success on that first outing.

Suddenly, the next period of your life as a band has certain expectations and ramifications – particularly if there's a label involved. And the markers of that success start to influence and impact the decisions you make around things like how you tour and what kind of music you put out, how it's serviced, and what the release schedules are like. You get this pressure – and that's not necessarily a bad thing, I think it's actually quite healthy for bands to have that so they can really push their career and give it the forward momentum they need to be professional.

But then it gets to a point where you run into a double-edged sword, where you might be pursuing things because you're trying to maintain a level of success that's expected with a certain theme or motif or trope – whatever led you to that success in the first place – and it might be creatively restrictive. You create a road that becomes quite defined.

The great thing about COVID, for us, is that we'd serendipitously ended our deal with Dew Process – not out of malice, we'd just fulfilled the contract – so musically *and* from a professional perspective, we had no deadline for anything. And because the whole industry was decimated, there was no expectation put on where we were supposed to be or *who* we were supposed to be. We had no concept of when [our next album] was going to be released, so we all kind of went into this record with the mindset of, like, "I just want to make whatever *I* want to make."

It was, for me at the time, a very personal and selfish exploration – which is *exactly* the way you want to make music, right? That's the best kind of music, when you kind of go back to the template you have when you first decide to become a musician, and you first venture into "bandom" and all that sort of stuff. So *Home* reflects *that* – returning to that place, musically, where our motivation was so *pure*, and we weren't thinking about what the band is and where it might end up, or who might be listening to it, or what the label or the publisher wants.

Whether you admit it or not, in your deep subconscious, *of course* all of those things have an impact on your music, because all of a sudden people are invested in what you're doing. And that's good – those things *should* have an impact on your music, right? But in this situation, all of that was gone. So we kind of returned to "home", and we were able to be completely free, creatively and artistically. And with that, we kind of found what Ferg and I would consider to the truest form of Kingswood we've had since the start of it.

Is that why you recorded a lot of it live, too?

Laska: Yeah, absolutely. We all ended up in a studio on a ranch in Wongawallan, which is at the base of Mount Tambourine in Queensland. I don't know how we pulled it off; it was during the lockdowns, and there were certain days when the borders were open for like 72 hours – and we somehow managed to get three weeks on this ranch up in Queensland; it belongs to a friend of ours' folks, and it's got this amazing studio built into it. So Ferg was staying out the back in a trailer, I was in this little service room, and the guys were all sleeping in the control room. And we'd get up, drink heaps of whiskey, and just record what we were playing. Everything was live, and everything would feel exactly like the band that we are.

Linacre: It's a lot of fun listening back to the last takes of everything, when everyone was fucking *hammered*. The magic would be about five takes before that, and then it's like, "Oh, fucking hell..."

Laska: And the conversations at the end, where we're like, "Man, that was good! We sound like The Rolling Stones!" And then you'd listen to it and it would be the shittiest thing ever – the guitars were so out of tune that no-one could hear anything... It would hilarious. But we got loads of great takes before we got *too* pissed, obviously.

Well there were three versions of *Juveniles* altogether, so you know we'd line up in droves to buy the "drunk version" of *Home*.

Linacre: That's it, though – the version you're hearing *is* the drunk version [*laughs*].

TYING THE KNOTS

KNOCKED LOOSE PREPARE TO MAKE LANDFALL AT THE FIRST-EVER KNOTFEST AUSTRALIA, AND HEAD INTO A NEW ERA WITH THEIR LONG-AWAITED THIRD ALBUM.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **ALDARA ZARRAOA.**

This year will mark four since Knocked Loose dropped their game-changing second album, *A Different Shade Of Blue*. And although they did release an EP in 2021 – *A Tear In The Fabric Of Life*, which alongside an ambitious animated short, marked a bold leap forward in the band's artistry – fans have been clamouring for a new full-length effort from the Kentucky-native hardcore lords. Thankfully, as lead shredder Isaac Hale tells *Australian Guitar*, they won't be waiting too much longer: Knocked Loose will complete their third studio album in 2023.

Before then, they'll make the trek Down Under for the inaugural Knotfest Australia, hitting showground stages in Melbourne, Sydney and Brisbane over the last weekend in March. As well as Slipknot – obviously – the festival will see Knocked Loose bump shoulders with the likes of Parkway Drive, Megadeth, Trivium, Northlane and Amon Amarth – a solid cohort, to say the least, further proving that Corey Taylor was right when he called Knocked Loose "the future of metal".

In our chat with Hale, we touched on that authoritative declaration, the band's well-established connection to Knotfest, and what to expect from Knocked Loose's third album.

So you're just about to touch down for the first-ever Knotfest Australia. What's the vibe like as you gear up for the trek?

It still seems so far out. With everything we do, because we have so much planned at all times, things don't ever seem real until we're doing them; it's one thing to see it on a flyer or in a text, but then actually getting on the plane and playing the shows, it only seems *real* when you're right in the thick of it. But Australia is my personal favourite country, and it's been four years since our last trip, so I can't wait.

Knotfest is a great way to get back there and kind of tease us maybe doing a future tour of our own. Every single time we've been to Australia, it's been for a headlining tour – we've never done a festival before, minus that one UNIFY Gathering a long time ago [2018]. So I'm very excited for the opportunity to play such a large festival over there – I think it's going to be a cool vibe that we haven't really experienced in Australia yet.

Y'all played the Iowa Knotfest in 2021. What was it like to play Slipknot's festival in their actual stomping grounds?

The festival now has a name for itself – I feel like everyone and their mother has played Knotfest at this point. We were pretty late to the game, if anything, because it seems like every day there's a new Knotfest that pops up. But we finally had the chance to play the Iowa one, and it felt really, really cool. Slipknot are from Iowa and Knocked Loose are from Kentucky, and those are both, like, middle-of-nowhere states – so it felt cool to play their version of a hometown show, right in the middle of that middle-of-nowhere.

I'm not sure exactly how many people showed up, but it was probably many, many, many thousands – and it ended up being one of the best sets we've ever played. I'm not even joking, it was seriously incredible. And we just felt super blessed – and really surprised, because we played relatively early; we played at like 2pm, and I don't know if it was just something in the air that day, or whatever it could have been, but the crowd just went nuts for us. That was a really really cool entrance to the Knotfest scene.

I remember a couple years ago, [Slipknot frontman] Corey Taylor gassed up a bunch of new bands, and he proudly declared Knocked Loose to be "the future of metal". Is that a responsibility you're willing to take?

Oh, absolutely. I mean, that is a super huge compliment, obviously, coming from such an important person in heavy music. It's very, very humbling and very, very amazing to hear. But I think if I was going to view that comment like, "Okay, now I'm going to take it upon myself to save heavy music," that would just make me a bit of an asshole.

The truth is, everyone in Knocked Loose genuinely loves heavy music – we love hardcore, we love metal, we love punk – and we're just having fun with it, using it as our creative outlet. And all the success we've had, I think it's just a direct reaction to how hard we've worked and how much we care about what we're doing. If someone else wants to tell me, like, "You're really like making a name for every music and you're helping push it through to the next generation" – that's a wonderful compliment, which I'm always willing to accept. But I'll never view myself as some saviour of heavy music.

We're coming up on four years since y'all dropped *A Different Shade Of Blue*. How far along are you on album #3?

Well we dropped an EP over COVID, *A Tear In The Fabric Of Life*, which was a really fun project to work on, and one that we put more work into than anything that we'd ever done. But we're currently in a pretty consistent state of writing. We always write music together – we're not really the band that demos separately, we like to meet up and write somewhere together, because we all live in different places. And we've already had a couple of writing sessions – we've got some songs that are done, some written, and some *being* written.

We could write 30 more, or we could call it how it is now... You know, we don't have any specific plans at the moment. There's no release date in our calendar, or even any dates for recording just yet. But you know, there is music being worked on, and there is music we have waiting to be released. We're still in the planning stages, but you know, we're dedicating this year to making the new record happen, for sure.

Last year you told *Sweetwater*, "We think about the identity of the band a lot when we're writing." How do you see that identity evolving with the next album?

It's kind of tough, because you don't really understand that until the record is *out*. It's very reflective, you know? We put out that EP, and it wasn't until months later that we were like, "Holy shit, we did that!" But I will say, with this next album being our third, we're much more aware of what Knocked Loose is than we ever have been. Because you know, the third LP is usually a very important record for a band – I'm not going to say it's a make-it-or-break-it kind of thing, but it's definitely a chance for us to step things up.

I would just say that we're trying to do more of everything. Instead of trying to head in one specific direction, we're trying to just enlarge the scope of everything we already do. I want to write our craziest songs, and I want to write our most melodic songs. I also want to write our catchiest songs, and I want to write our saddest songs too. Knocked Loose is a heavy band, but it's always encompassed a couple of different styles and emotions. And what I want people to expect, I guess – or what we're aiming for – is just to not leave any of those directions behind, but widen the scope for, and improve on, all of them.

MUSTANGS AT MIDNIGHT

TEENAGE DADS RIFF ON THEIR GRIPPING NEW EP, *MIDNIGHT DRIVING*, AND THE INESCAPABLE ALLURE OF THE FENDER MUSTANG.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **HECTOR CLARK**.

Last year was a huge one for Teenage Dads, with three momentous single releases – 'Exit Sign', 'Teddy' and 'Hey, Diego!' – sprinkled across a touring slate most up-and-coming bands could only dream of; in addition to lucrative spots opening for Lime Cordiale and Spacey Jane, they delivered two mammoth headline tours of their own, with 34 shows between them.

The band would be excused for taking this year off to catch their breaths, but instead, they're gearing up to make 2022 look like child's play. At the start of March, Teenage Dads will drop the six-track *Midnight Driving* EP, which takes the indie-rock flair of their first few records – the most recent being 2021's *Club Echo* EP – and nudges it into a smokier, more headstrong atmosphere inspired by '80s new wave and dance-punk classics. In tandem with it, they'll embark on an east coast tour – playing two shows each in Brisbane and Melbourne, and one show in Sydney – where they'll headline their biggest stages to date.

From there, Teenage Dads have no plans to settle, with lucrative tour plans rolling in faster than they can keep up, and stacks of new songs growing taller by the day. Before all of it comes to a head, Australian Guitar caught up with frontman Jordan Finlay and guitarist Connor McLaughlin, who were more than happy to give us the lowdown on how *Midnight Driving* will kick them up to a new level.

So we're officially just weeks away from the release of your ripping new EP, *Midnight Driving*. How are y'all feeling as we enter the home stretch?

Jordan Finlay: It's exciting! We just sold out all the 18+ shows on the tour – which is our biggest tour to date in terms of capacity – so yeah, it's all-gears-forward right now.

Connor McLaughlin: We've had a bit of build-up to these songs coming out because we'd been teasing them at all the shows we played last year. Every night, we'd pick a new song that was unreleased and play it at the show. And then we'd gradually have more and more people going, "When's that one song coming out!?" So finally, you know, here they all are! Hopefully everyone's still keen to hear them [laughs].

What song do you reckon is going to remain a setlist staple from hereon out?

Finlay: Well, I know one of the big ones early on was 'Teddy', which we started playing when we toured with Lime Cordiale at the start of last year. And then 'Midnight Driving', the title track from this EP, that was one we played heavily on the Spacey Jane tour last August. I'd say both had a similar response, in terms of it getting people keen to hear it recorded and all that – so they're both songs that have definitely cemented their spot in our setlist, I think, for a long time to come.

As the band starts playing those bigger and bigger shows, and you see the atmosphere of your crowds shifting with them, are you starting to shift your approach to songwriting?

Finlay: I'd say so, yeah. We still try to stay true to ourselves and do what we like doing – that's always going to be the most important thing. We don't want to sell out and do certain things because we know they'll do well or whatever. We just want to do what we think sounds cool, and if people like it, that's mad. If they don't... Sucks to be them [laughs].

What guitars were y'all tearing it up on in the studio for this EP?

Finlay: I think we were mainly using the Fender Mustangs. Connor and I had our DuoSonics with us for backups, but Angus also had a Mustang bass, so we're all a part of the Mustang gang!

What is it about the Mustang that just melts the butter over your popcorn?

McLaughlin: Jordy wasn't playing guitar on the first couple releases, and Angus was kind of the first one to step up and buy some pro equipment. He got a Mustang bass right off the bat, so I think he might have started that bandwagon.

Probably about a year after that, I found an absolute steal on Facebook Marketplace, this pink Mustang guitar, and I sent it to a friend – I was like, "What do you reckon about this? You should cop it!" And he went, "Nah, man, you should get it." And I thought, "Yeah, you know what? I will get it." And I've been playing it ever since. It's got a lot of mileage on it now; a lot of tweaks, a lot of fret dresses, a lot of cleaning rust off the bridge and stuff like that... I've really put it through the wringer.

Finlay: I just got a Mustang at the start of last year. I don't know why I love it, though – it's just got that Strat-y kind of sound, but not too much of it, you know? It's just that classic Fender sound, it's so gooey.

What about effects? Do y'all froth hard over pedals?

Finlay: I wouldn't say we have a massive rig. I only use three pedals, because Connor's built these homemade attenuators that we can chuck on the amps, and we just crank the shit out of the tubes on the amps; we both have an EQ on for the whole set, so we're able to really drive it, and the clean tone on the guitar is just that little bit warmer. But I'm using a bass preamp, a clean boost, a drive and an Ibanez Tubescreamer. It's a pretty dirty setup, but it's good.

McLaughlin: I guess my setup was a little bit more extensive at one point, but I found that I just wasn't using stuff. I used to have an Oktava on [my pedalboard] and a [JAM Harmonious Monk] that I'd use like a pitch squealer-type thing. But I found that I was just using it to make myself laugh in the set, not as much as a tasteful thing.

And the wah pedal, that went a little while ago – the first time we flew as a band, we didn't book our flights very well and I didn't have any room in our luggage for a pedalboard case, so I took all my pedals in my pockets, in a big jacket. That was the point where I was just like, "Yeah, I'm never bringing this wah pedal on tour again." So now, for my main sound, I use a preamp fuzz for leads and then an analog delay and an analog vibrato.

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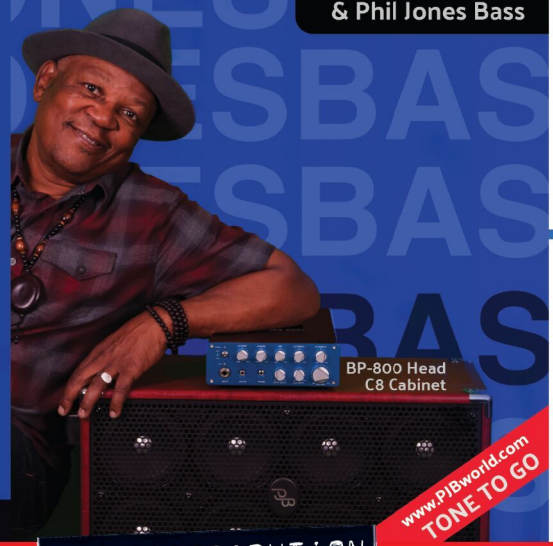

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SHREDDING STAMPEDE

ANIMALS AS LEADERS' JAVIER REYES DIVES DEEP ON THE FINE ART OF TRANSLATING TECHNICAL PROG-METAL TO THE STAGE

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **TIM MOSENFELDER**.

We're not even a quarter of the way through 2023, but it's already shaping up to be one of the Australian live music circuit's biggest years in recent memory. One of the many epic runs we have to look forward to comes courtesy of Animals As Leaders, who are set to tour last year's enthralling *Parrhesia* album Down Under in April.

The wait for *Parrhesia* was truly brutal: it arrived in March of 2022, a whole five years and four months after *The Madness Of Many* (2016). And because *The Madness Of Many* brought Animals As Leaders to a musical peak we couldn't ever have foreseen, all eyes were on the instrumental djent lords as they endeavoured to one-up themselves. Against all odds, though, they pulled it off: *Parrhesia* not only offers some of the band's most technical, trippy and tangled musical concepts, but it shows a growth in their songwriting that proves they're one of the most important acts in the modern landscape of guitar music.

Before the band take *Parrhesia* to Australian stages, we caught up with one of Animals As Leaders' two soul-stirring guitarists, Javier Reyes, to discuss the art of authentically translating technical prog-metal (a style best known for painstakingly studious production) to the stage, and what's next on the cards for his fruitful partnership with ESP.

Obviously when you're flying halfway across the world, you can't bring your entire guitarsenal with you – but what are the kits that you just can't do without on tour?

Well obviously for me, my signature guitars are the go-tos – one, because they're my signature guitars, but two, they're just workhorses. I'll probably bring my Strat as well, but international tours can be tricky with guitars and stuff like that, you know?

For the bigger bands, it's easy to get tonnes of shit sent ahead of time, or they'll already have gear set aside in certain countries. But for us, it's always a matter of narrowing down what we can fly with. So I'll probably bring my eight-string Strat and two of my signature JR-608s, and then we always have to travel with the Strandberg, which I only use for one song – 'Physical Education' – and it's the one song that we always have to play... That and 'CAFO'.

Have you thought about writing some more stuff with the Strandberg?

We have. We just haven't written anything else in that range in a while. We probably should at this point, though, because then it'll be less annoying to have to bring that guitar out every night.

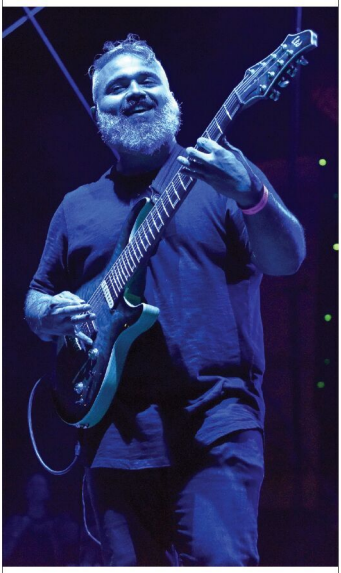
I know that otherwise, you're an ESP ride-or-die. What was your latest drop with them?

It's a seven-string version of the original signature, so the JR-7 – which in my opinion is actually better than the eight-string model; the neck profile and body just feel better at that size... I guess it's one of the rare instances where size doesn't matter.

What's next in the pipeline?

There's the Strat, which should be coming out at some point this year. It's got the same neck profile as my signature, and the same bridge pickup – the signature Fishman that I have – but then it's got two additional custom single-coil pickups, so that way it still has a bit of that Strat sound.

The first custom Strat I got from ESP was just three single-coils, but for the style that we're doing now, and for versatility, I think it's more important to do hum-single-single. So that's what we put on this guitar,



and hopefully at some point this year, it'll be out on the market. I can't tell you a price point right now, but I'm pretty sure it'll be expensive.

And then in terms of effects, you're fully digital these days, right?

For the most part, yes. Particularly touring – at least for my parts, just as far as the range goes, and for the control I want over things like volume and little details like that, I think it would be too hard to do with an actual amp-and-pedal combination. I've used the Axe-FX for years at this point, both at home and in the studio. You know, there's times on tour where I'll use a Kemper and there's times where I'll use real amps, etcetera, etcetera, but in the studio at least, I like to keep it all stuck to the Axe-FX.

Do you like to tweak or experiment with your tone from time to time?

Yeah, quite a bit. I think originally, with the idea of using a Kemper or Axe-FX, this whole "digital modelling" thing – at least for me – came with this mindset of, like, "Okay cool, I can take the sound I have at home and bring it to the stage." And I try to do as much of that as I can, but whenever I get to rehearsals or on a stage, it starts to feel too different and I have to start tweaking some stuff. But you know, you can only do so much because every stage kind of feels different.

The benefit of doing what I do is that with the Axe-FX, I can run two virtual rigs, and one of those is a hybrid rig. So there's two signals being sent to the front-of-house and my in-ears – there's a fully digital signal, just sending my amp sim and a cab sim – and then there's an additional signal going out to a cab onstage, which is going through a power amp and/or a normal head. And then we mic that up, and that also goes out to the front-of-house.

Onstage or at rehearsals, I may tweak the sound that I'm hearing onstage to the cab. But the direct tone, which has the modelled cab and amp, that's always unaffected – unless my front-of-house guy explicitly asks me to tweak it – because it's so hard for me to actually reference that once I'm no longer in my home studio. And vice versa: when I'm in my home studio, I don't really have the benefit of always using my cab signal.

How have you found the *Parrhesia* songs translating to the stage?

I would say they're translating better than most of our other albums' material. I think over the years, both through playing live and through our growth with production and composition, we've had a bunch of material that we know doesn't work live, but sounds amazing on the recording. But I think we have a natural tendency to kind of avoid those things, you know?

We're always looking for what is going to be the most impactful live – but at the same time, compositionally, we might be doing less of the more intense shit... Or at least finding new ways to do the intense shit. There's still a lot of intense shit [on *Parrhesia*].

Do you feel like you're able to write songs more freely nowadays, knowing that not everything on a record needs to be played live?

I think the goal will always be to be able to play it live. But there's always a bit of a gamble, right? Especially the more dense that you get [with the soundscapes], the more experimental you get with guitar tones and stuff like that, the riskier it can be. I think the easiest parts to translate live are what we know already as "traditional tones". So with with our material, there's always a bit of a gamble.

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POE'S LAW

LARKIN POE SPILL THE BEANS ON HOW *BLOOD HARMONY* REINVENTED THEIR ALREADY-ONE-OF-A-KIND ARTISTRY.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**.
PHOTO BY **TIM MOSENFELDER**.

Since the last time we saw Larkin Poe melt hearts on Australian shores – all the way back in April of 2019, when they debuted Down Under for that year's Bluesfest – the roots-rockin' sisters have released their fourth, fifth and sixth studio albums. *Self Made Man* dropped first in June of 2020, promptly soaring to the top of charts in the UK and the US, and even cracking the Top Ten in Scotland (it helped that it was a critical darling, too). The gals followed it up with *Kindred Spirits* just five months later, putting their bluesy alt-folk spin on classics by the likes of Elton John, Elvis Presley, Neil Young and Phil Collins.

Never ones to slow down, Larkin Poe returned to the studio the following year to mint *Blood Harmony*, a full-scale reevaluation of everything that made them such a buzzy act in their halcyon days. Having always worked on their own, the duo – Megan and Rebecca Lovell – welcomed into the studio their longstanding live band, smashing out eleven absolute corkers with spirited aplomb. The goal was simple: a human-sounding record that their audience could really connect with – both when they spun the songs at home and when they heard the Lovells play them live.

If all the shaky, phone-shot footage we've binged gives us any indication, Larkin Poe scored their goal with a kick worthy of a World Cup – they've always been a band that shines brightest live, but these songs take their spark and truly sets it ablaze. Before they make the trek back over for Bluesfest 2023, *Australian Guitar* caught up with the Lovells to chat about how they pulled it all off.

Six albums into your career, how did you want this record to really push Larkin Poe into a new era?

Rebecca Lovell: Well, we started our own record label in 2017, and at the same time – in an effort to take all of the creative freedom into our own hands – we started self-producing our albums and making music more in-the-box. I would program all the drums, and we would play all the instruments ourselves. It's a little bit diametrically opposed to the spirit of roots music, but we thought that it was really fun, and I think it pushed us in a lot of ways.

But in making this album, I think we were kind of running up against the limitations of making music in-the-box. You *can* do a lot with machine-made drums, but you sort of start to miss the humanity of a real kit. So instead of going down a similar path, we decided we were going to take a "scorched earth" policy and try things a new way. So we brought in some real-life musicians – and that took a leap of faith for us, to sort of throw out our process. Because it was working for us, and people were really loving the albums we were making – but we needed to blaze new trails, so we just went for it.

Megan Lovell: It's still a family affair, though, like the band we brought in are all people we trust implicitly. Tyler Bryant was co-producing – he's Rebecca's husband, and one of his band members is Caleb Crosby, so we brought him in on drums. My husband played keys, and then our touring band members, they came in and did some stuff on the album as well.

Were there any creative stakes in that as well? Do you feel like this record is a little more colourful *because* of the voices you had in the studio with you?

Rebecca: Yes! I think certain decisions were made that we wouldn't have made had it been just the two of us. And for that, I'm grateful. It's awesome to be able to have trust and faith in people to take your music somewhere where you couldn't take it yourself. And that felt really good, to open it up, to have the people that we love also be involved in making the music with us.

Having done *Kindred Spirits* before this record, did you find that you came away from the process – not just celebrating those other artists, but imbuing into their songs your own energy and flavours – with a new perspective on your own songwriting?

Megan: I think our series of video covers – which we've been doing for a number of years now – has had a significant impact on the way that we write. It's a bit of a backwards way to go about it, but you do learn a lot about your own voice when you're trying to take someone else's song and make it sound like your own. So doing that over and over again has taught us a lot about who *we* are. And it's great to learn the structure of other people's songs – and not just "other people's songs", but some of the greatest songs ever written.

Rebecca: And I do think that *Kindred Spirits* also served as a really effective leap-frog, you know, from that sort of in-the-box music-making approach to what we're doing now. *Kindred Spirits* was just the two of us sitting in the studio and tracking live – which does take some courage, because you're taking out that factor of control, where you can be like, "Oh, I didn't quite nail that, let me do it again," or, "I messed that up, but it's alright, we'll cut that little piece out."

When you're doing it live, you're really putting yourself, as an imperfect individual, on display. And I think we got a lot more comfortable with doing that on *Kindred Spirits* – realising that it actually sounds *more* like us when we don't like mess with it. So we took that approach much more intently with *Blood Harmony*, and I don't think we would've done that if we hadn't built up a bit of a callus and courage [with *Kindred Spirits*] to be like, "Okay, this is *okay*." You know, it's okay to put our best foot forward, and have that "best foot" be a little bit imperfect. It's better that way. It's more human.

Speaking of which, y'all just started your all-time biggest North American tour. Four months, right?

Megan: Yeah, it's a big one! We've been able to tour overseas a lot – Europe has been a particularly great market for us, they've been very supportive to us over the years – but we've had a little bit of a harder time touring here. I think it's mostly because we tended to spend more of our time touring overseas. But it's really great to finally be able to tour a lot more at home.

After this run, you'll be heading back to Australia for Bluesfest 2023. Are you guys as stoked as we are?

Rebecca: Of course, it's been so long! I think we really got our hopes up over the last couple of years, thinking that we might be able to come back, so we're *very* ready to. We've only ever been to Australia one time, and we had an amazing time on that tour. I mean, especially since we'd never been there... Like, when you go to a country for the first time and you already feel that groundswell of support and love... It always blows my mind.

Megan: One of the the shows is already sold out!

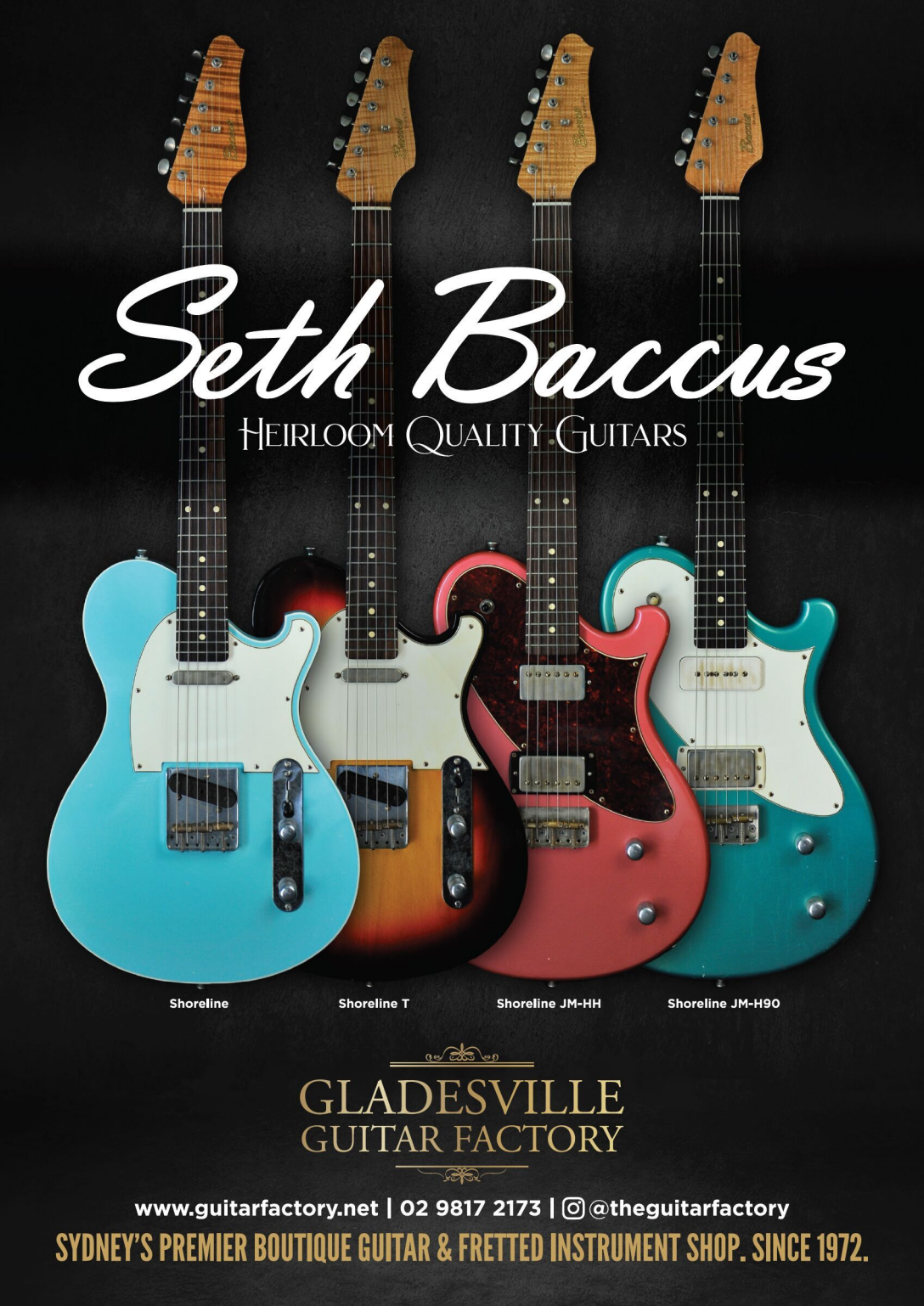
Rebecca: Yeah, which is so cool! I don't know if we've ever really had that happen before, actually, where we've had to add another show because tickets sold our so quickly.

So how much has your performance changed over the last four years? What can we expect to see this time around?

Megan: A lot of energy – and if the audience is open and receptive, a lot of connection. Because it's very important to us to really have that one-on-one connection with the people in the audience.

Rebecca: I would also say, like, just your individual musicianship. I think we've all gotten better as players, but you are really finding some new territory, musically, that really impresses me... Like in rehearsals, you'll start improvising on a solo and I'll be standing there like, "Woah, where are you *going!?*" So I'm excited for myself.

Larkin Poe will perform at the Byron Bay Bluesfest on Thursday April 6th and Friday 7th. They'll also perform headline shows in Sydney (Sunday April 9th) and Melbourne (Monday April 10th and Tuesday 11th).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KING OF THE BAY

MARCUS KING FILLS US IN ON WHAT TO EXPECT FROM HIS UPCOMING BLUESFEST SETS, COMING HOT ON THE HEELS OF HIS RIVETING NEW ALBUM *YOUNG BLOOD*.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **PETER VAN BREUKELEN**.

Four years after he first stunned Byron Bay with three soulful and searing performances, Marcus King is returning to Bluesfest this April (alongside a pair of headline shows in Sydney and Melbourne). He's touring in support of his second solo album, last year's ultra-poignant *Young Blood,* over which the 26-year-old blues prodigy bared his soul, warts and all, more poignantly than ever.

Ahead of his return, *Australian Guitar* sat down with King to talk about the impact *Young Blood* has had on his live set, and why it all hinges on the chaotic camaraderie he has with his barnstorming band of brothers.

We know your setlist at Bluesfest '23 will be quite different from last time – you've got two more phenomenal records of material to showcase – but as a performer, how do you think you've evolved over the last four years?

It's been a pretty big growth period, you know, between the last time we saw you and the next time we'll see you. I think the pandemic – everything stopping for a couple of years – made us all look a little deeper within, and take a little more time to pinpoint what was wrong and access our problems head on, instead of using devices to mask them. So I think we've grown a lot as performers, but we've also grown a lot mentally – and the music has grown as a byproduct of that.

Especially given how intensely personal and raw they are, what's it been like to share these *Young Blood* songs with new people, and welcome them into that world every night?

It's been really cathartic, to be able to amplify that section of my life, and share it with people who are, for the most part, there to have a cathartic experience of their own. It's really moving to me that I can share this music with them, because it helped me when I was writing it, and hopefully these people are being helped by it too. And you know, the reaction that we've gotten from the fans has been really, really nice; they really dig the record, and that's what we care about the most.

To play these songs about things like heartbreak, addiction, your struggles with mental health... Can it be daunting to open yourself up like that to new crowds every night, or has it almost become second nature?

Well, it's really my first nature. I'm not really good at hiding my emotions. I remember when I moved to Nashville, when I started writing with other people, and during my first co-write, somebody pitched something, and my face must've been contorted 'cause they were like, "Well, Marcus didn't like that one!" So I just decided to never change that about myself.

I think that's why people enjoy having me in a room – because I'm honest, but I'm honest in a friendly Southern kind of way. That's how I am with my audiences. I try to be completely vulnerable with them, and they know that everything I'm saying is true. It's a very vulnerable position that I put myself in, but it's worth it, 'cause that's how people know it's real.

I know you like to shake the setlist up from show to show, and having seen you live at that last Bluesfest, I know it's always pretty unpredictable. Is it important for you to always keep yourself on the tips of your toes?

Yeah, entirely. The setlist is like a representation of like my manic tendencies. The show is really just a manic episode – and sometimes you can see it happening in realtime, sometimes I'll feel an urge to play three minutes of cacophonous, improvised sounds – and the band always falls right into place with that. I've always been a really big fan of that kind of music, and the chaotic nature that an artist like Sun Ra or Eric Dolphy – or any of those avant garde players – can bring to their music to represent mental torment and stuff like that.

So starting off with some kind of a ballad that I wrote in a dark place, and then going into something really fast, to kind of check it all off and move forward, that's a big part of it. And you know, I push the hell out of the band. I like to play everything at something we call the "cocaine speed". I call it that because if you listen to something like [Joe Cocker's] *Mad Dogs & Englishmen* – or any other number of live records from that era – you'll notice that the live version is always a little bit quicker. And it's probably just adrenaline, but it may be something a little extracurricular too. So we dubbed that the "cocaine speed", and that's what we like to do live.

Is that a testament to the collaborative energy and chemistry you have with your band?

Absolutely. They know how to deal with me and follow along with my vision. Some nights, you know, I take them right out to the edge – but they go out there with me and we brave the elements together. I just love those boys so much. We grew up together, really. I had to grow up really fast, they've been right beside me the whole time.

What guitars can we expect to see you shredding up a storm on at Bluesfest?

I'm probably going to bring my Gibson ES-345 signature – it's a prototype replica of my grandfather's Big Red. And I've got a new Banker custom that I've been rocking, which sounds incredible. And I think I may bring this Les Paul that I'm really freaking out about. I love it. It's a '58 Les Paul Custom, and it's had just about everything you can imagine done to it. It's come straight off the island of misfit toys, so I really get along well with that guitar.

Did you make those customisations yourself, or have them put in? Or did you pick the axe up like that?

Well, it had a lot of customisations when I got it, but they weren't really to my liking, so it's with the doctor right now actually, getting some surgery.

I want to know more about Big Red, too – what's the backstory?

My grandfather was a serviceman – he was stationed in Ramstein, Germany first, and then he was stationed in Great Falls, Montana. And [while he was there], he bought a 1962 ES-345 from another serviceman. The story goes that Hank Garland had it first, but he decided to stick with the sunburst model from the same year. And you know, I'm not sure how true that is, but it sounds good. And my grandfather played it until he died; I was 14 and he was 74 at the time. He played it his whole life. That was his one and only. So when I was 18 and leaving home for the first time, my dad gave it to me as a kind of "good luck charm". It kind of feels like my grandfather's still with me, keepin' an eye on things.

Marcus King will perform at the Byron Bay Bluesfest on Friday April 7th and Saturday 8th. He'll also perform headline shows in Sydney (Monday April 10th) and Melbourne (Wednesday April 12th).

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ASH GRUNWALD GETS NOSTALGIC ABOUT HIS ROOTS IN MELBOURNE'S BLUES SCENE AS HE GEARS UP TO HELP LAUNCH THE CITY'S FIRST-EVER OFFICIAL BLUESFEST.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**.
PHOTO BY **MARK METCALFE**.

Few artists have played as many Bluesfests as Ash Grunwald. 2023 will mark his eleventh year on the bill for the Byron Bay staple (delivering his 20th and 21st sets), but it won't just be the Byron Events Farm that Australian blues fans will be able to watch him shred up a storm – he'll also help kick off the first-ever Bluesfest to be held in Melbourne.

It's a bit of a multifaceted full-circle moment for Grunwald, having cut his teeth in Melbourne's scene before relocating to Byron Bay. So ahead of the monumental occasion, *Australian Guitar* sat down with the bluesman-slash-national-treasure to embrace every bit of the explosive excitement.

So it's been almost a year since you dropped your ripping last album, *Shout Into The Noise* – what have you been up to since then?

I've been doing a lot of stuff! Mostly just booking shows and working on my major playing; I've got a new single that's a bit more country-ish, and I haven't traditionally played much in the "pretty majors" so I've been working on getting better at that.

What's drawn you over to the major keys?

I haven't written many songs in major keys – I'm always playing pentatonic riffs and things that are more groovy, or just soloing. And when I first started making music, it was weird – I kind of screwed my nose up at anything major... Which is, you know, most music. I just couldn't bring myself to play anything in a major key. But most things I do aren't strictly speaking minor either – I play a lot in the minor pentatonic, so it's just *riff, riff, riff!* But it's been cool, learning the soulfulness of "pretty" music.

Why now?

Just development, I think. I did a lot of co-writing on *Shout Into The Noise*, and [some of the people I worked with] came up with a lot of pretty melodies. And it's so funny – the crazy irony is that *Shout Into The Noise* was my most personal album. I wrote a song called 'I Want You To Know' – that was one of those co-writes, and it was really pretty, and I'd written it for my kids.

I was really worried about playing it live, but I can just remember that last Bluesfest, you know, everybody was singing it at the top of their lungs, and it was such an emotional moment. And I like those moments! I like when I can really get into it. But for me to sit there in a room, alone, and get that same kind of feeling... I just don't know if I'm able to go there, emotionally, by myself. I need someone else to give me those chords – even if it's just a simple chord or a melody – and then I'll do it.

It was really an experiment for me, on this last album, to be writing that way. Basically I'd made it so that I had no rules – I was never going to say, 'That doesn't sound like me' and not do it. Another song from that [process is] 'Tell It Like It Is', which ended up being a song about living hard on the road and [struggling with] drinking problems – which are very true and personal. And that led to me practising a lot [on the guitar], doing fingerpicking and soloing over major chords, and realising how beautiful that can be.

I'm glad you mentioned playing Bluesfest, because in a couple of months, you'll be playing the inaugural edition of Bluesfest Melbourne. How does it feel to be a part of this historical moment?

Yeah, it feels awesome. It's gonna be great. I'm going to be playing with the same band that I did at Bluesfest last year. I'm [performing] with two of the best players in the game – Bobby Alu on drums and Ian Peres on keyboards – so I'm really looking forward to it.

There actually used to be some blues festivals in Melbourne, back in the day. There was one about 20 years ago, where I was playing at the same time as Ray Charles, and he wouldn't go onstage until I shut up. And I thought I was going off – I thought I was *killing it* – but they were actually turning my front-of-house all the way down. I think by the end of it, I just had my monitors onstage blaring, and that was it [*laughs*]. And I still wasn't going off! But that was a lot of fun – that was the same festival where I got to meet my hero, Tony Joe White, who played many Bluesfests throughout the years.

It's very cool that Bluesfest is heading to Melbourne. I'm from Melbourne originally, and that city taught me pretty much everything I know about blues and roots music. And you know, being from Melbourne, the dream had always been to end up in Byron Bay and perform at Bluesfest – and I ended up living here, right around the corner from the Bluesfest site. The festival's been a huge part of my career up to this point, so to be going back to Melbourne as part of it, and playing the first edition of it there... It makes sense!

Next year will be your tenth Bluesfest, right?

I would say so, yeah. It sounds like a cliché, but I've honestly lost count [*laughs*].

I know you played your first in 2004, which today must feel like a lifetime ago. But from your perspective, do you think the festival has evolved over those 19 years?

Well first of all, the most obvious one is that it's changed locations. I started off in the Juke Joint, which was the smallest stage, and I'm pretty sure it was in a footy clubroom. Those were my semi-humble beginnings, but those weren't the beginnings of Bluesfest – the festival's been going [since 1990], and *that* was definitely more of a humble beginning – but I wasn't a part of that story.

But you know, it was just electric. It was an amazing time to be playing blues and roots music – and doing that one-man-band thing, I'd go to every one and be like, "I've gotta make this count! I've gotta make sure they get me back!" And the electricity in the air was always insane. It's always very special when you when you do those solo gigs like that.

It was a really good time for actual roots music, too. I think you still have it now, because you have artists like Ziggy Alberts who have a big following – but you have it in a different way, and for that scene, back then, roots music was a very mainstream thing. So in a way, [Bluesfest] was a culmination of two different scenes – there was the traditional blues lineup, and then there was this influx of young people frothing on roots music.

Let's bring it back to 2023: what can we expect to see you tear it up on this year? What are your go-to road guitars?

When I'm playing with the band in standard tuning, I always use my Gretsch Broadkasters, which I *love!* I've got two of them, and I just froth hard on those things. They're just beautiful and articulate, but still really full-bodied; I use the neck pickup a lot, and that always gives me the fattest sound.

That articulation is so important, that's really what I need for my playing – because it doesn't come naturally to me. I can get a bit wolfy in my sound, because I have a bassy ear. But the Broadkaster is just really easy to play, and even on the neck pickup, there's a lot of that articulation. So there's that, and then I'll usually play a couple songs on my National Steel, usually tuned to open C. Then when I'm playing slide in open G, I'll use my Gibson ES-137, which is another beautiful guitar.

Ash Grunwald will perform at the Byron Bay Bluesfest on Sunday April 9th and Monday 10th. He'll also perform at the inaugural Melbourne Bluesfest on Saturday April 8th.

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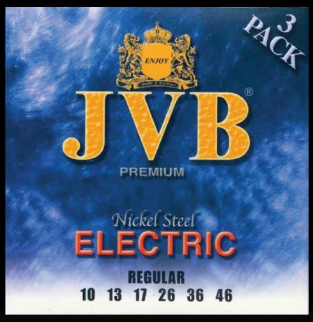

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THE GOLDEN 'TONE

CHRISTONE 'KINGFISH' INGRAM CHATS BLUESFEST, BUDDY GUY, BLAZING TRAILS AND BEAUTIFUL TELES.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **PER OLE HAGEN**.

With how fiercely he owned the stage at last year's Bluesfest, it's no surprise that Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram will be returning for his second consecutive edition. The young virtuoso delivered a stonking *four* sets at Bluesfest '22, and although he'll only play half as many this time around, he'll also appear at the inaugural Bluesfests in Perth and Melbourne. Not only that, he'll also take to theatres for his own shows in Adelaide and Sydney, and open up for the iconic Buddy Guy – a close friend – in Sydney and Melbourne.

Australian Guitar sat down with Kingfish to find out exactly what we can expect from the Mississippi maestro's impending return, how Guy has had an immeasurable impact on his ever-evolving artistry, and what it's been like to link up with Fender for his stunning signature Telecaster.

What's brought you back Down Under so soon?

Man, I just really enjoy it there. And everybody there seems to enjoy us, so you know we had to make that booking back again!

So you played four sets at Bluesfest 2022 – did you get to shake it up every time?

I did, man. It was a great experience. I had always known about Bluesfest as a kid, so to finally be able to join that lineup – along with so many others like George Benson and Hiatus Kaiyote – it was amazing, man. I enjoyed it so much.

As well as Bluesfest '23, and your own gigs in Adelaide and Sydney, you're playing two *very* special shows with Buddy Guy. You've got a pretty storied history together – do you remember how you first linked up?

Man, I do actually. The first time I *met*-met Buddy was in the year 2013. I opened for him in Virginia, and I didn't really have a name back then, so he didn't remember me. But as the years went on, I sat in with him again and we developed a friendship. And it all led to him paying for my record and going on tour with him, which was incredible.

It kind of goes without saying that Buddy Guy is one of the all-time greatest bluesmen. What does it mean for you, personally, to have this kind of kinship with him?

Man, it means a lot! Because Buddy was one of the first bluesmen I had ever saw that did the style of blues I was really interested in – that high-voltage energy, you know, real *crazy* blues. So to be able to rub arms with him, it feels like things have come full circle. And he's been an amazing help [for my career], for sure.

Is it a goal of yours to really blaze those kinds of trails, and take the blues into new territory like Buddy did?

Oh, most definitely. Most definitely. I feel like anyone playing the blues in this day and age, you know, that should be one of their aims, to bring it to the new generation. It don't matter how you bring it – just bring it to 'em. For sure.

Is that partially why you're drawn to collaborations with artists like Big K.R.I.T, for example?

Most definitely. One of the ways I think you can get young people into the blues... And this is *one* of the ways – I know some people might disagree, but this is just what I feel – I feel like if you just mix a little bit of *their* world into what you're doing, [it becomes easier] to grasp them. And once you grasp them, you can sit 'em down and teach 'em about the real, raw thing. And honestly, that has been working really well for me.

Where is it that you wanna head from here, creatively? Do you have a vision in mind for album #3?

Oh, sure, yeah! I think people are used to seeing me in the bluesy, rock-y area, but I want to do more music that showcases my voice. You know, more of an R&B style – something soul-ish, you know? Some real Barry White-style stuff. Yeah, that's the new direction I'm going in.

Have you started working on that next record?

Oh, yeah, man. I've been in and out [of studios] with some different producers in LA, and I'm trying to book a session down here [in Mississippi]. You know, I want to call some friends in and get to riding this brainstorm on some stuff, man. For sure.

Collabs?

Yeah, man! I can't talk too much about those, but yeah, you *know* they're coming [*laughs*].

For now at least, you've been shredding out on this goddamn *beautiful* Tele, the Kingfish Telecaster Deluxe. What's it been like working with Fender?

It's been great, man. We actually had a bunch of Zoom meetings like we're on now, and I just told 'em what I wanted, and they delivered it. So over the last couple years, I've kind of accepted the fact that I'm not a single-coil guy. So I told them, "You know, let's build a Tele with some humbuckers modelled after the '50s-style LPs." They took everything I said into consideration, and man, they did it all – '70s headstock, regular LP tailpiece... Yeah, they really hit the nail on the head, for sure.

What kind of voicing were you after with those custom Kingfish humbucking pickups?

I wanted something that can go really heavy when I'm playing that bluesy rock – just balls to the wall, you know – but also something that can really clean up when I pull the volume back. Because like I said, I do play R&B-style music, I play gospel music, I play soul – so I wanted something that could feel heavy *and* light. I wanted the best of both worlds.

Did the guitar itself go through many iterations?

There was one iteration – I wanted the colour to be lighter [*laughs*]. but other than that, everything was dope. The sound was amazing. And that finish – purple is my favourite colour, and they made their own [proprietary] colour for it called Mississippi Night.

So obviously, the next step from here... It's gotta be a Kingfish pedal collection, right?

[*Laughs*] Man, I ain't even think about them – but hey, you never know!

What would your ultimate pedal be?

Man! It's been done before, but what I would like to make is my own distortion wah – you know, a pedal that has distortion *and* wah in the same unit. I know Morley has one, but I would definitely love to do something like that in my own style. Because those are, like, the only two effects I use.

What are the exact pedals you're rocking with these days?

For almost everything, I use a Mini RAT distortion and a Mini Cry Baby wah. And then I use a Boss DD-3 for delay on certain songs. Everything else is just tuning.

Christone 'Kingfish' Ingram will perform at the Byron Bay Bluesfest on Friday April 7th and Saturday 8th. He'll also perform at the inaugural Bluesfests in Perth (Saturday April 1st) and Melbourne (Sunday April 9th), as well as headline shows in Adelaide (Monday April 3rd) and Sydney (Wednesday April 5th), and shows supporting Buddy Guy in Melbourne (Monday April 10th) and Sydney (Wednesday April 12th).

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FUTURE

HOWLING GALE(S)

AHEAD OF HIS MONUMENTAL RETURN TO AUSTRALIA, **ERIC GALES** REFLECTS ON THE MOST REWARDING CHAPTER OF HIS CAREER THUS FAR – AND WHY IT'S FAR, FAR FROM OVER.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **PETER VAN BREUKELEN**.

It's official: we're in the golden age of Eric Gales. Some four decades after cutting his teeth in the early '80s, the former child prodigy sometimes known as Raw Dawg has immortalised himself as one of the greatest bluesmen of our generation. And he's only getting better with age, as proved by his recent nomination for Best Contemporary Blues Album at the 2023 Grammy Awards – the first time he's earned such a nod.

The record that did it for him, *Crown*, has also been dubbed by fans as one of his strongest efforts yet – a raw, bold and uncensored deep-dive into racism and sobriety via thick, tearing blues riffs – earning some of his career-best reviews and most impressive sales. And in April, Gales will take the record to Australia, hitting Bluesfest twice in Byron Bay and once at the inaugural Melbourne iteration. Before he does, *Australian Guitar* caught up with the man himself to kick the hype train into overdrive.

So you kicked the year off on one hell of a high note, dropping 'Tennessee Whiskey' with The Bar Kays and Wendy Moten. What was it like bringing that little gem to life?

This was all their idea, they just called me in to be a guest on it. But it's definitely an honor to be on a song with the legendary Bar Kays and the miraculous Wendy Moten. We're all from Memphis, so it felt like a good fit for all of us. And I've always been a fan of the song 'Tennessee Whiskey' – I think we did a good job with it.

You've done a handful of these killer team-ups over the years. Do you find that by connecting with other artists, you're able to unlock something special in your own creativity?

Absolutely, man. Absolutely. I like to call it "swapping energy" – you can have a conversation with another artist, back and forth, without actually having to say a word. It's pretty awesome. And you know, everyone that I've been so fortunate enough to do that with, they've been special in their own right. I am highly looking forward to doing more things like that in the future – especially on the heels of all the recognition that's coming about from *Crown*, you know, the Grammy nomination and the Blues Music Awards... I'm just really grateful for all the good things coming from all the hard work we put in over the years.

So on *Crown*, you did 'Take Me Just As I Am' with your incredible wife LaDonna, and before that, on *Middle Of The Road*, there was 'Repetition' with your younger brother Eugene. Is it particularly special for you when you're able to get that family vibe keyed in?

Of course! I mean, with Eugene, he's been there from day one – that's some original Eric Gales Band material right there. That's my big brother, man – it's always a treat and a pleasure to incorporate him. He doesn't play very much nowadays, but when I'm able to talk him into it, it's pretty awesome. And of course with my wife, it's a win-win all the way around. When we get to do what we love and make music on a grand scale like that, and we can put it out there for the world to observe... It's really something.

Like you said, between the Grammy nominations, all the other accolades, and the huge year of touring you had, the *Crown* cycle has been such a trip. Now that you've got some time to sit down and breathe, how do you reflect on the journey so far?

I'm just taking it one day at a time, man! I'm just so grateful for everything that's coming about right now. You know, I've worked tirelessly for so many years, so the recognition that I'm getting now – to get to this point and to finally see that it's all coming to the light, reaching the ears of people that might have missed the boat over the past 30-plus years that I have been around... I guess the saying fits now more than ever: it's better late than never. And I'm still here, you know? That's basically all I have to say to the masses – I'm here, and I intend to be here until I can't be here no more.

How much juice do you reckon you've still got in the tank for the *Crown* cycle?

With the anticipation I have for everything coming up, I'd assume [2023] could be one of my biggest years yet. I've got a lot of big tours, a lot of great dates that are coming up... And you know, and some other things that I can't really talk about right now [*laughs*]. You'll find out when it's the right time.

You've been putting music out for something like 35 years now; How do you stay inspired to keep pushing yourself forward?

I just keep listening to people that inspire me, and it all kind of recycles itself. It's kind of like an ecosystem, if you will: I listen to the stuff that gets me choked up and makes me want to be emotionally involved, and that recycles into fuel for my own engine. Generally, I have no idea where the ideas that pop up are going to end up – but at the end of the day, I'm never disappointed with where it winds up going.

What inspires you in 2023?

A little bit of everything, man. A lot of gospel, a lot of hip-hop, a lot of R&B – your Jazmine Sullivans, your Tori Kellys... At the moment, it's a lot of people that don't necessarily got anything to do with guitar playing. That's what really sends me off into "Eric Gales land" – by nature I am a guitar player, and I'm always going to incorporate a guitar and bring those nuances and influences that I've been moved by all my life, from Albert King to Muddy Waters to John Lee Hooker... But you take those and blend them with the other styles and spices that I'm a huge fan of – your Isaiah Sharkeys and your Snarky Puppys, and all the different [artists] out there just killing the game and making your hairs stand up... The talents floating around in the universe right now, man, it's continually blowing my mind. You've got your Christone 'Kingfish' Ingrams, your Derek Trucks, your Robert Randolphs, your Marcus Kings... All these guys out here that are just *killing* – it's more motivation for me to just keep pushing through.

You'll be rubbing shoulders with some of those dudes at Bluesfest 2023. What's the pre-show vibe like?

If I'm not mistaken, this will be my third time. And every time, man, it has just been incredible. From the first time I went to Byron Bay and had my mind blown at how well-orchestrated that festival was, with such huge names and such eclectic choices of different styles and genres of music... It really makes me stand back and think, I'm very humbled and proud to be one of those acts that gets to be a part of it. And this year's festival, coming on the heels of one of the big biggest years of my life... It's going to be amazing. I mean, I'm going to see my buddy Kingfish, I'm going to see the legendary Bonnie Raitt, Joe Bonamassa... It's going to be huge, man.

Are you going to bring Joe out for 'I Want My Crown'?

Well, I'm gonna tell you this much – if we're there at the same time, and we can get on the same stage without any issues, it is *definitely* going to happen. For sure.

Eric Gales will perform at the Byron Bay Bluesfest on Thursday April 6th and Saturday 8th. He'll also perform at the inaugural Melbourne Bluesfest on Sunday April 9th.

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RAITT ON TIME

BONNIE RAITT FUELS UP THE HYPE TRAIN FOR HER FAST-IMPENDING RETURN DOWN UNDER.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTOS BY **BRIAN RASIC** AND **TIM MOSENFELDER**.

More than five decades after she broke out as a trailblazing blues-rocker in the early '70s, Bonnie Raitt is enjoying one of the most fruitful chapters in her career: last year, she earned a Grammy Lifetime Achievement Award and the Icon Award at the Billboard Women In Music Awards, and already in 2023, she's earned four Grammy nominations – including a monumental nod for Song Of The Year – all on the back of her stunning 18th album, *Just Like That*...

Equally acclaimed by critics and fans, the album arrived last April and promptly topped six of the US' Billboard Charts. Here, it peaked at #4 on the ARIA Jazz And Blues Albums chart, making for one of her most successful releases Down Under. So, just shy of a year on from its release, Raitt is returning to Australia this April, performing at her fourth Byron Bay Bluesfest (following previous stints in 2007, 2013 and 2017) as well as theatre shows in Sydney and Melbourne. Ahead of those, Raitt sat down with *Australian Guitar* to riff on her undying legacy, connection to Australia, and love for her iconic Stratocaster 'Brownie'.

It's so wild to think that *six years* have passed since your last trip Down Under! How does it feel to be heading back?

Well to tell you the truth, after the last two-and-a-half years of house arrest – which the whole world was on because of COVID – this past year has been incredible. In all of the 50 years I've been on tour, I've never been more grateful to see the looks on people's faces when we're out there onstage every night. The first shows we did when we came back out... The tears were *flowing*.

I mean, I'm always grateful for what I do, but to finally get back to doing what we love and playing live, it's just been the most amazing feeling. And then this year, to be able to come back to Australia – I've got so many friends there and so many fans that I can't wait to see again, so I'm very honored that they're giving us two nights at Bluesfest.

You're obviously no stranger to Bluesfest – this will be your fourth since 2003. What is it about this festival that really melts the cheese on your burger?

Well first of all, that whole area of Australia, Byron Bay, is just one of the most gorgeous places in the world. My only regret is that I don't get another week to hang out there – *at least* another week – because I always end up meeting all the locals and they say, "Aw, come back anytime!" *And I will!* I'll come back and just spend a week enjoying the scenery.

But at Bluesfest... You know, it's hard to beat the festival atmosphere. When you're the artist, you can't really just wander through the crowd – unless it's a day off and you're wearing a hat – but I can always tell from the ecstatic throngs of mud dancing, it's a wonderful atmosphere. And nobody there cares about the weather. I just love outdoor festivals; I love the New Orleans Jazz Festival, I love Glastonbury... But Bluesfest always has an incredibly inventive lineup, it's always really well-rounded, the food and the party atmosphere, the setting... You just can't beat it.

It feels like a microcosmic little town for that week, doesn't it?

Exactly! I have some friends that live there in Byron Bay, and I said to them recently, "Are you dreading it, or are you excited?" And they said, "Oh my God, after COVID, we're really looking forward to it!" I know you guys had all-Australian acts last year, and my friends who went said that was fantastic, too. It's just ironic that so many of my friends from America are going to be at this festival, but it takes me going halfway around the world to get to see them [*laughs*].

Before you jumped on the Bluesfest bandwagon,

your very first tour here was in 1992 – just over 30 years ago! Do you remember much of what you got up to on that run?

Well, it had taken me 20 years of performing to finally get enough record sales to warrant paying for the trip. I was thrilled to be on tour with Marc Cohn, who I've since become very close friends with – we still tour all the time together. He'd just had his big hit, 'Walking In Memphis', and I'd just had *Nick Of Time*, so we kind of came in celebrating those big breaks – and we were so surprised by how many fans we already had in Australia, even though we'd never played there.

I'm a huge longtime friend and huge fan of Renee Geyer *[editor's note: Geyer died shortly after this interview was conducted]*, and she showed me all around Melbourne and the Yarra. And then my drummer Ricky [Fataar] lived in Sydney for 10 years, and he's good friends with Tim Finn and a bunch of the Crowded House guys, so I got to reconnect with them and a bunch of other friends that I only knew in the States – and they showed me around Sydney, which was lovely.

I also loved going to Perth, which was like a little time capsule of the '70s back then. It was just as if Little Feet and I had come out with our first records, and everybody there had just stayed right with us all through the '80s.

Flashing back to the present, you're currently touring on the back of your phenomenal 18th studio album, *Just Like That*. How's the cycle been so far?

The record has gotten an incredible response – much more so than I was expecting. I mean, I always love making my records, and I always make sure they're up to my level of heart and expertise and musicianship and all of that; I really try to put everything I have in there, because we're going to be touring behind that record for two or three years. And I pick the songs so that I can play them live – that's what really informs which songs I put on which record, I go, "God I haven't played a shuffle in a really long time," or, "Yeah, I think it's about time for another reggae song…"

This was a particularly inspired batch of songs – probably because of the COVID break, I was able to do a little bit more digging in. I wanted to stretch out into some different directions and write a song from a third-party point of view, not just my personal life. And so I wrote two acoustic songs, and I put the music to 'Just Like That', the title song, right before I recorded it – even though I had the lyrics for a while. But I was really inspired by the loss of my dear friend John Prine, who died from COVID just a short while before I wrote it.

I'm really honored to be nominated for that song at the Grammys this year – it's one of the frontrunners for Song Of The Year, which is a big surprise! But we were at #1 on the Americana charts for, like, ten weeks, and the response was enormous. And I was thrilled – especially coming back after COVID – because I really wasn't expecting that kind of acclaim.

Speaking of acclaim, you've always had a particular reverence for this one guitar: the legendary "Brownie". Do you still strum around on that lil' gem?

Oh, yeah – every gig since 1969! That's when I bought it – I bought it from a friend of mine, for $120, at three o'clock in the morning. And I loved it because it had no paint on it.

How does that guitar inspire you creatively?

Well, I love playing the electric guitar, and the

Stratocaster has always been my first choice. I do take other guitars out on the road with me: I always have two of my signature guitars, which are used for different songs – I carry more guitars on the road so I don't have to retune them all the time. As I get older, my voice has changed a bit, so I have certain songs that are in open A tuning, then A flat, then G – so you know, my techs can just run out and give me the right guitar when I'm doing a song in a different key, just so I don't have to stand there and retune.

I love all my guitars for different reasons. They all have different sounds and they're all completely inspirational in their own ways. And the thing is, I like having another guitar player in my band *because* his guitars sound different to me. Together, you know, we're like Keith and Ronnie – there's a really nice blend of tones, and you don't want to have the guitars sound too much the same. So when I'm playing the Strat, Duke [Levine] or George [Marinelli] will play the Tele. And you know, it's all about the whole, overall sound – which keyboard sound you have with certain guitars, and then how the drums fit in with them… It's almost like putting together a meal.

I can only assume you've gotten your hands on hundreds, if not thousands of other guitars over the years; what is it about the Strat that always keeps you coming back?

Well, for starters, I have never played a lot of guitars – I've only ever had this one guitar, and I didn't get any others until I did my signature model with Fender. If it ain't broke, don't fix it! And you know, I'm not a gear-head: I use a compressor for the Strat, and then on the acoustic, I used to use a chorus pedal, but I don't even do that anymore. I've got a boost pedal that I use for my solos, just so I don't blast everybody's ears off during the rest of the songs – and that just about does it for me.

But the Strat: I love Hendrix and Clapton and all of those guys, so I was inspired in that sense. It's got the tone I like. I like way it feels and the way it fits on my body, and I really just like the guitar itself. I don't find the need to look for a lot of other guitars. I've got a great Gibson ES-175 from 1956, which I got a great deal on, and I play that – and then I play a couple Guild guitars as well, and I love them. I also have a purple custom National with a cutaway, which Larry Pogreba made for me.

I can't wait to see them all in the flesh at Bluesfest.

We're going to kick some serious ass! We're really looking forward to the trip. And my friend Mavis [Staples] will be there with us for the whole run – we just toured together for a couple of months over the summer, and she is just epic. I'm hoping I can jump up onstage with her [during these Australian shows].

Bonnie, dude, you can't tease us like that! We're holding you to it now.

I'm going to text her right now and say, "I just said it out loud to the Australian press, now we *have* to do it!" We love singing together, so I'm sure she'll be fine with it. And you know, like I said, there's a tonne of people I never get to see in America, and they're all going to be at Bluesfest, so I can't wait to see them all too. And I'm thrilled to be back in Sydney and Melbourne again! I wish we were able to play all the way across Australia, but you know how it is… I guess we'll just have to come back for another tour.

Bonnie Raitt will perform at the Byron Bay Bluesfest on Sunday April 9th and Monday 10th. She'll also perform headline shows – supported by fellow Bluesfest artist Mavis Staples – in Melbourne (We dnesday April 5th) and Sydney (Friday April 7th)

ROCK 'N' ROLL NEVER DIES

STEVE VAI REFLECTS ON THE LEGACY OF THE GREATEST ROCK 'N' ROLL FRONTMAN YOU'VE NEVER HEARD OF – THE TITULAR SECOND HALF OF HIS NEW ALBUM, *VAI/GASH*.

WORDS BY **ELLIE ROBINSON**. PHOTO BY **MARIANO REGIDOR**.

In an alternate reality, Steve Vai never kept winding down the rabbit hole of inventive and experimental techniques that birthed such mind-melting records as *Flex-Able* (1984) and *Passion And Warfare* (1990), and later *The Story Of Light* (2012). Instead, he pivoted down a more rocking and rolling path, taking the metallic cues we'd hear on *Sex & Religion* (1993) and cranking them way past 11. He did that with the assistance of Johnny "Gash" Sombrotto, the most chaotic and captivating hard-rock frontman you've never heard of – and sending them soaring up the charts was their eponymous debut album as the power-duo Vai/Gash.

That reality remains alternate because in September of 1998, Gash died in a motorcycle accident. He and Vai actually did record their album, seven years prior in 1991, as nothing more than a fun hobby for the latter artist. Then, Vai was a career musician hellbent on consistent reinvention, and *Vai/Gash* felt too similar to *Sex & Religion* to warrant a release so close to it. But he did plan to release his album with Gash in due time, once the pair had a chance to reconvene on the cusp of the new millennium and whack out a few more songs. But after Gash's death, Vai kept the album secret for just shy of 25 years, only unearthing it to reminisce in private.

A quarter of a century later, the former half of Vai/Gash has shared their titular album – a ripping, rollicking '70s rock record drawing parallels to AC/DC, Guns N' Roses, Whitesnake and their ilk – to honour his late friend. Keen to expound on Gash's undying legacy, the time-honoured virtuoso caught up with *Australian Guitar* for a notably celebratory chat.

Given the personal significance of this record, how does it feel to finally be releasing it to the public?

It's a great relief. What's so interesting about this project, to me, is that I did it on a whim. I was in the middle of other projects, and I was just hanging out with a group of friends who, like me, were really into biker culture. We had Harleys and we'd go riding all the time. I had this one Harley, it was one of those big full-dressers with this incredible sound system in the back – even the seats had speakers in them – and when you're jammin' down the highway and you've

got music blasting... Man, it is so freeing. But I just didn't have the music that I wanted to hear when I was riding that thing, you know?

I had a specific brand of music in my mind, that I thought would be most appropriate for that kind of lifestyle, and I thought, "Well, if I can't find it, I'm gonna make it!" So I stopped everything I was doing and jumped in the studio for... Probably a couple of weeks. And it was like a stream of consciousness, it went so fast: I would lay down a click and improvise a bass part, and then I'd put the guitars on it, then the drums, and then Gash would come in and lay the vocals down. They were more or less just demos – but once they were done, we had music to listen to on our bike rides.

Gash was my best friend during that period. We had a great little club. And to explain what Gash was like as a person – that's impossible. His name was John Sombrotto, and he was one of the most dynamic, interesting, funny, intense, over-the-top people I ever met. 60 percent of his body was burned – he had an accident when he was 21, he was climbing these high tension wires and the electricity arced.

Was he always much of a singer?

I first heard him sing on a video that he made for his father – a Frank Sinatra song – and he sounded just like Frank Sinatra! He had this beautiful smooth, crooning voice. But I also heard him fooling around with rock 'n' roll singing, and when that happened, I'd stop and go, "Wow, there's a killer rock 'n' roll voice in there!" So I grabbed him, I threw him into the studio, and I just could not believe what came out of his mouth. It was perfectly suited for this music – and he was suited to be a rockstar, you know?

I've worked with plenty of rockstars, you know, and I've worked with some very effective lead singers. And all the greatest ones I've ever known – the ones that had *juice* – they also had this particular personality trait... Some people might call it "lead singer syndrome", you know, they need to be the center of attention. I don't think that's a bad thing. I think it's an attribute to being an entertainer and commanding an audience, you know? And Gash would have fit right in in that league.

So he and I did this record so fast, in such a blur of energy and excitement, that I don't actually remember a lot of the details. I don't know who the drummer is. I tried to find out – I asked everyone I could've remotely been involved with, and they all said, "Nope, that's not me." It's a mystery. I recently did an interview with Japan, and they can be *very* specific about details. "What amp did you use? What guitar did you use? What pedals" And it's like... I don't *know*. All I know is that I used one amp, one guitar, and one sound for the whole record – I just wanted to rip this stuff out, and I wanted it to sound like good, fun, catchy, uplifting, straight-ahead rock music.

It's the kind of record that I think a lot of people thought I would've made back then... And I did! I just never released it, because I only had eight songs, and I wanted to get more. I was thinking, "I'll do *Sex & Religion*, and then I'll finish this record..." But John died. He was in a motorcycle accident. And I was so disheartened when it happened, that I just put the record on the shelf. But I listened to it a lot throughout the years, and it always held a warm spot in my heart, because it reminded me of Gash... And it's just *good f***ing music,* man! That's it. And I have no qualms saying that.

At the time, had you intended to release the record and tour it with Gash?

Well at that time, we didn't have a band or anything. It was all my project and I just hired him to come in and sing it, you know? And we did play a gig – we did a couple of songs together at a bike rally. His brother just recently reminded me of that, he told me that he actually has a tape of it. That might be the only live recording of Gash and I that exists. And I don't even know what songs we played, so I'm interested in hearing that tape myself! But I didn't think about releasing it back then for a couple of reasons.

First of all, in 1990 the wall came down and grunge came in – and once grunge hit, that kind of rock 'n' roll wasn't cool anymore; it didn't feel like the right time for a record like that. Secondly, I didn't want to release something that sounded anything like the direction I was coming from, which was David Lee Roth, Alcatraz, Whitesnake... You know, that straight-ahead rock music – which is what the Gash record is. But that's not the direction I wanted to take at the time. I had just done *Passion And Warfare*, and once that came out, I just wanted to put a band together and do a rock record "Vai style" – and that turned in *Sex & Religion.*

There were also just a lot of question marks. When you release a record like [*Vai/Gash*], you usually put a band together and tour – and I didn't feel like I

wanted to go out and do that, because I'd just come from doing all that. We only had eight songs, too, and it's hard to go out and do a whole show with so little material. And honestly, I just wanted to do other things. The record almost felt too precious to give it to the wolves, you know? Because so many times I've released records and I've had such great expectations, and they've done okay, but they haven't lived up to those expectations.

You know, throughout my career, I've had to come to the realisation that my music can be limited to a particular audience. And that's fine – I love that audience and that's enough for me – but I just felt that if I released this record, it would just fall on deaf ears... Until now. Because now... I don't know, it just feels right to put it out now. It's 30 years later, and what I'm hoping happens is – what I'm *suspecting* is going to happen is – hardcore Vai fans will rally around it and spread the word. You know, every artist has those fans that pick everything up just to have; see that artist's trajectory across their different works. I think this will be a great little peek, for those people, into a particular type of career I could've had. It gives them the opportunity to daydream.

But it's really about Gash. Obviously, as this record comes out now, anything could happen – it could hit a nerve with some people, it could fly under the radar – but the people I'm talking to in this press cycle are responding more positively about this record than any of my other records, because they get it. It's easy to wrap your brain around. But in order for me to consider doing anything more than just releasing it, there would have to be an overwhelming response from people that are not just Vai fans. It has to completely transcend Steve Vai, you know? It has to be it has to be supported on the merits of its own quality, and the audience that likes this kind of music.

And if that's what happens?

...I don't know yet. You know, it would be unlikely that I put a band together and tour this [style of] music under any circumstance. Because firstly, I don't know if I *want* to go out and do that – I've done it and it's nice, but that's not what I'm interested in right now. And more importantly, there's nobody like Gash. I don't know how I could ever find someone that could take that spot. Those are *big* shoes to fill.

Not even the craziest of rockstar singers that I know could do it. First of all, they don't have the voice. And second of all, they don't have the attitude. Gash was a unique guy. That doesn't mean someone like him *doesn't exist*, but I wouldn't even know how to find them.

It would feel inauthentic if you were to tour it now, right?

Well, the life of the music on this record... There's three components. First is the song. And they're good songs – they're pretty straight-ahead and catchy – and they're beautifully melodic. It's very anthemic, free-spirited stuff. And then the second thing is just the attitude that John brings to the music. He makes the songs what they are, simply because of the way he sings them and the attitude [he brings to them]. And it's not just the songs [individually] – when you listen to the whole record, you paint a mental picture of this loveable, intense, quirky kind of person that can sing like that.

I'd have to find somebody that can infuse the music with that kind of attitude without it being phoney. Because rockstars learn how to be rockstars by watching other rockstars, and Gash had none of that. The first rock music he ever sang went right onto the tape. It was just so natural to him. It was stunning. And he wasn't placating anybody. He was incapable of that.

We'd all be standing around at a rally, you'd see a bike coming down the street, and it would be Gash standing on the seats in a T pose. When you buy the record and you open it up, the back cover is a picture of Gash riding his motorcycle, but he's sitting on the back seat, turned around, facing back and flipping the bird. And in another [photo included in the record's packaging], he's got his feet up on the handlebars and he's reading an *Easy Rider* magazine. This is a guy that would pop wheelies down the street on a 1200cc Harley.

He was crazy. He was constantly getting into pickles and accidents and shit. And finally, the thing that killed him... He had like a Ducati or something like that – you know, one of those rice burners, a really fast bike – and it had a double turbo, which is illegal. Because when you have a turbo on a bike and you downshift, the engine kicks in and takes off. And he was riding that [Ducati] and downshifted, the bike took off, and he went off the back of it and hit his head. And that was it.

The most remarkable thing about Gash was his organic naivety and authentic intention. I don't know anybody like that. All the rockstars I know, they play the part of a rockstar. But Gash was just *naturally* like that. He had that *spirit*. He was one of a kind.

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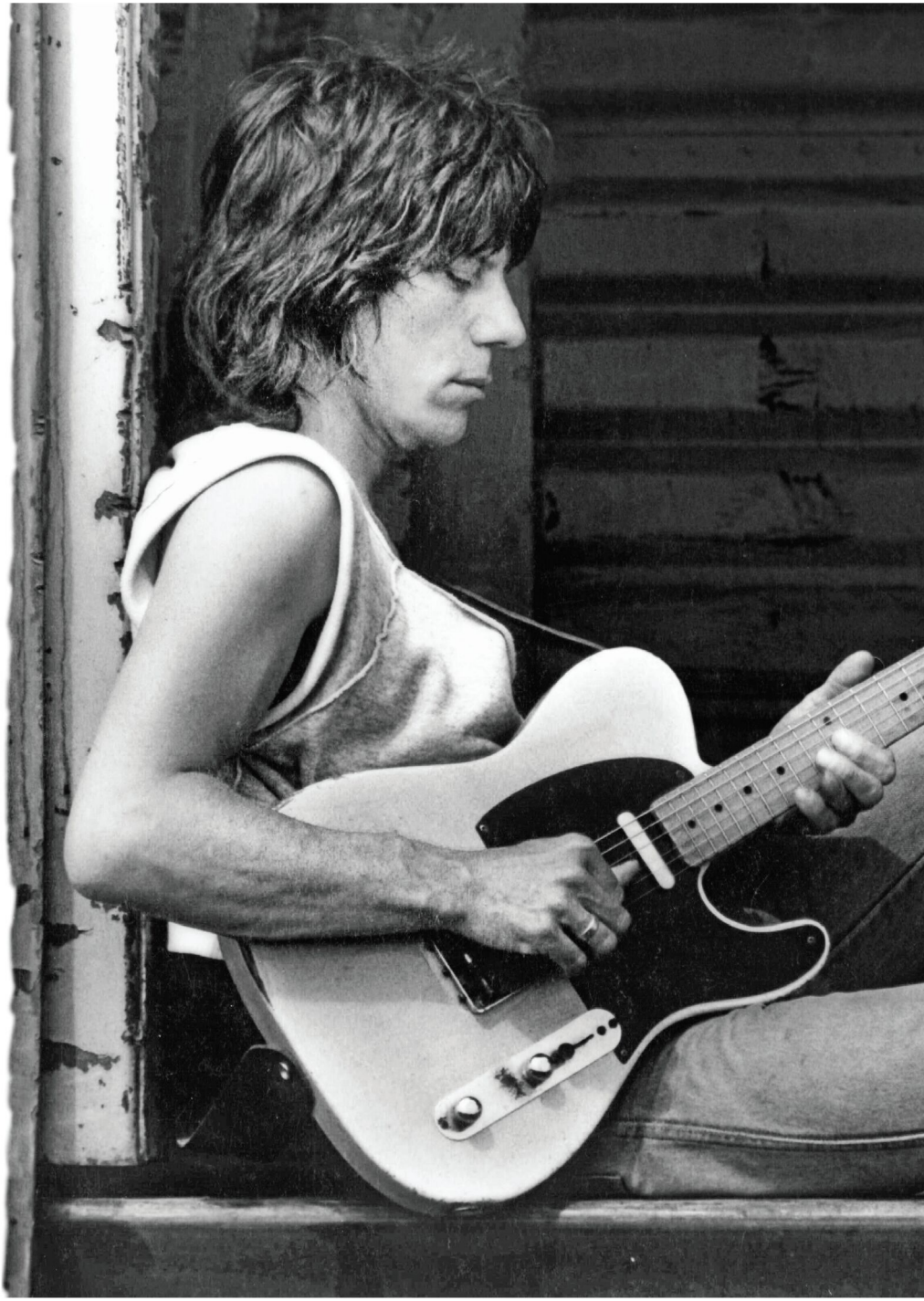
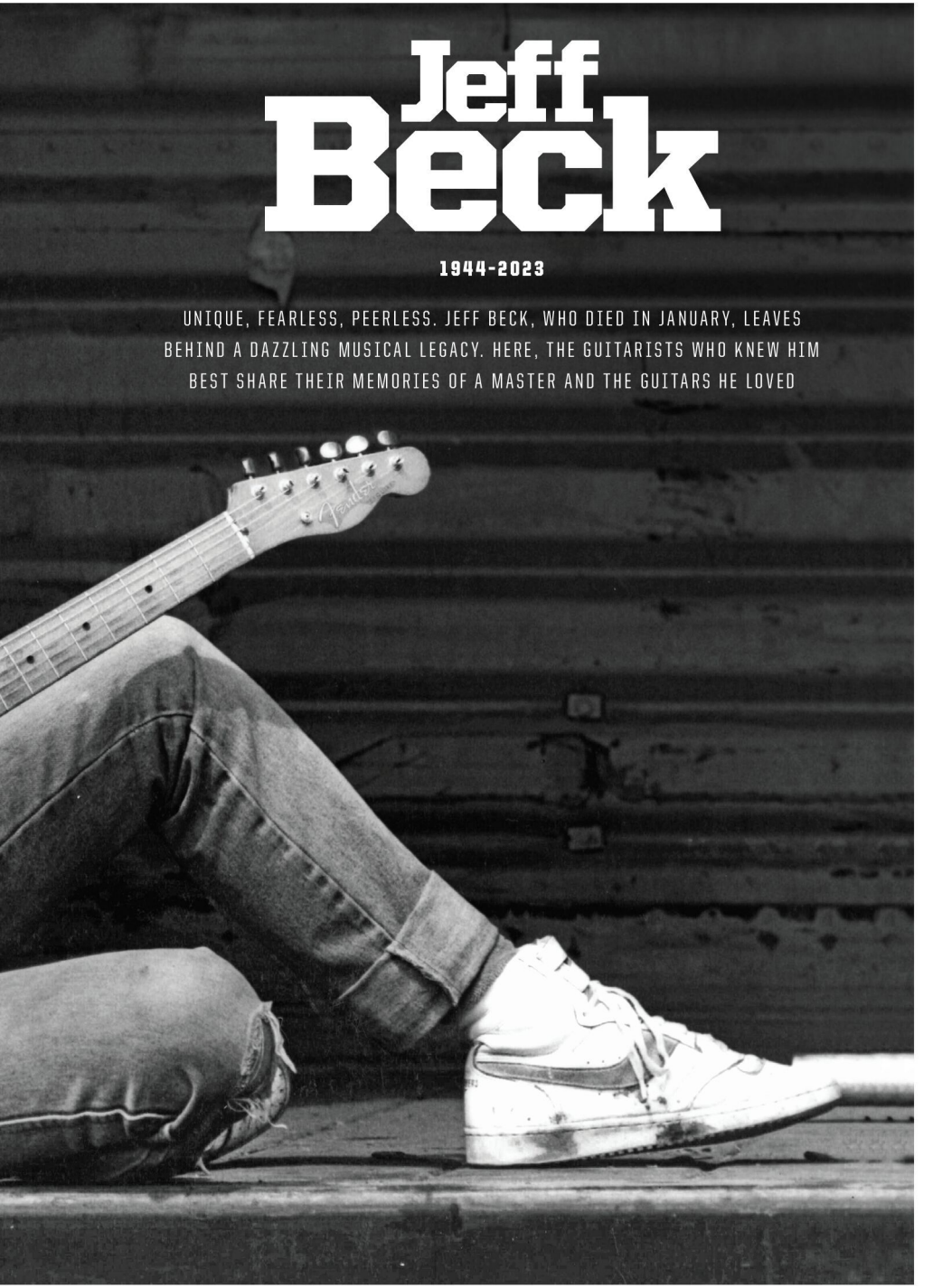


PHOTO BY ROBERT KNIGHT ARCHIVE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

Jeff Beck

1944-2023

UNIQUE, FEARLESS, PEERLESS. JEFF BECK, WHO DIED IN JANUARY, LEAVES BEHIND A DAZZLING MUSICAL LEGACY. HERE, THE GUITARISTS WHO KNEW HIM BEST SHARE THEIR MEMORIES OF A MASTER AND THE GUITARS HE LOVED



Life Of A Pioneer

FROM THE REBELLIOUS SQUARE PEG OF SWINGING LONDON TO THE STILL-QUESTING ELDER STATESMAN OF THE POST-MILLENNIUM, JEFF BECK REIMAGINED THE ELECTRIC GUITAR AS A MAGIC WAND IN A CAREER THAT COULD BE BOTH SPELLBINDING AND MADDENING

WORDS HENRY YATES

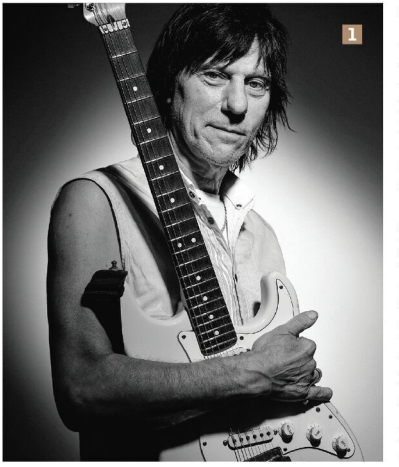
Among the golden generation of British guitarists who rose in the sweatbox clubs of 60s London, Jeff Beck was the great magician and lifelong contrarian. While peers such as Eric Clapton and Jimmy Page certainly boasted an eye-popping virtuosity and knack for melody, their playing was not unfathomable but squarely rooted in the American blues, revving up its stock vocabulary of slides, bends and pentatonics.

Beck could match his circuit-mates at these traditional Delta-derived shapes: revisit such masterclasses as *Steeled Blues* or *Going Down*. But while most Brit-boomers approached their work with a scholarly deference, their scarecrow-haired contemporary had a renegade streak. "If I don't break the rules at least 10 times in every song," Beck once reasoned, "then I'm not doing my job properly."

On a good night, when Beck played guitar, all tactile fingers and smeared notes, the instrument became something else – a lightning rod for otherworldly tones and textures, a multi-tool for sonic mischief the like of which only Hendrix was conjuring in that fertile period.

Over time, his technique would become a tapestry almost impossible to unpick. A flick of the fingers, a shiver of whammy bar, a swell from his Strat volume dials that evoked whale song. "It was like, 'What's he playing?'" remembers Phil Collen of Def Leppard. "It was like the first time you heard Eddie Van Halen tapping. Jeff Beck was like that his whole life."

And while that same wave of 60s guitar gods – or at least, those who lived – would rapidly eclipse Beck in fame, fortune and sales figures, leaving their old friend to be occasionally cast as rock's great underachiever, all acknowledged his touch was the unattainable gold standard and his discography the boldest in their class.



1. Always one with a mischievous twinkle in his eye, Beck once remarked: "If I don't break the rules at least 10 times in every song, then I'm not doing my job properly..."

PHOTOBY ROBBY SESSIONS

"The six-stringed warrior is no longer here for us to admire the spell he could weave around our mortal emotions," wrote Beck's former Yardbirds bandmate, Jimmy Page, as black news broke of the 78-year-old's sudden death from bacterial meningitis. "His technique unique. His imagination apparently limitless. Jeff, I will miss you along with your millions of fans."

Born in South London on 24 June 1944, Geoffrey Arnold Beck had his antennae up. Cliff Gallup and Chet Atkins inspired his weave of top-line melody and thumbed bass, while BB King was another early favourite, the bluesman's eerie 'one-note' style discernible in future Beck instrumentals like *Where Were You*. But it says much that a defining formative influence was Les Paul and Mary Ford's 1951 take on *How High The Moon*, the British pre-teen entranced by its multi-tracked manipulations. "At six years old, everything is new and exciting," he reflected, "but that never left me, the sound of that."

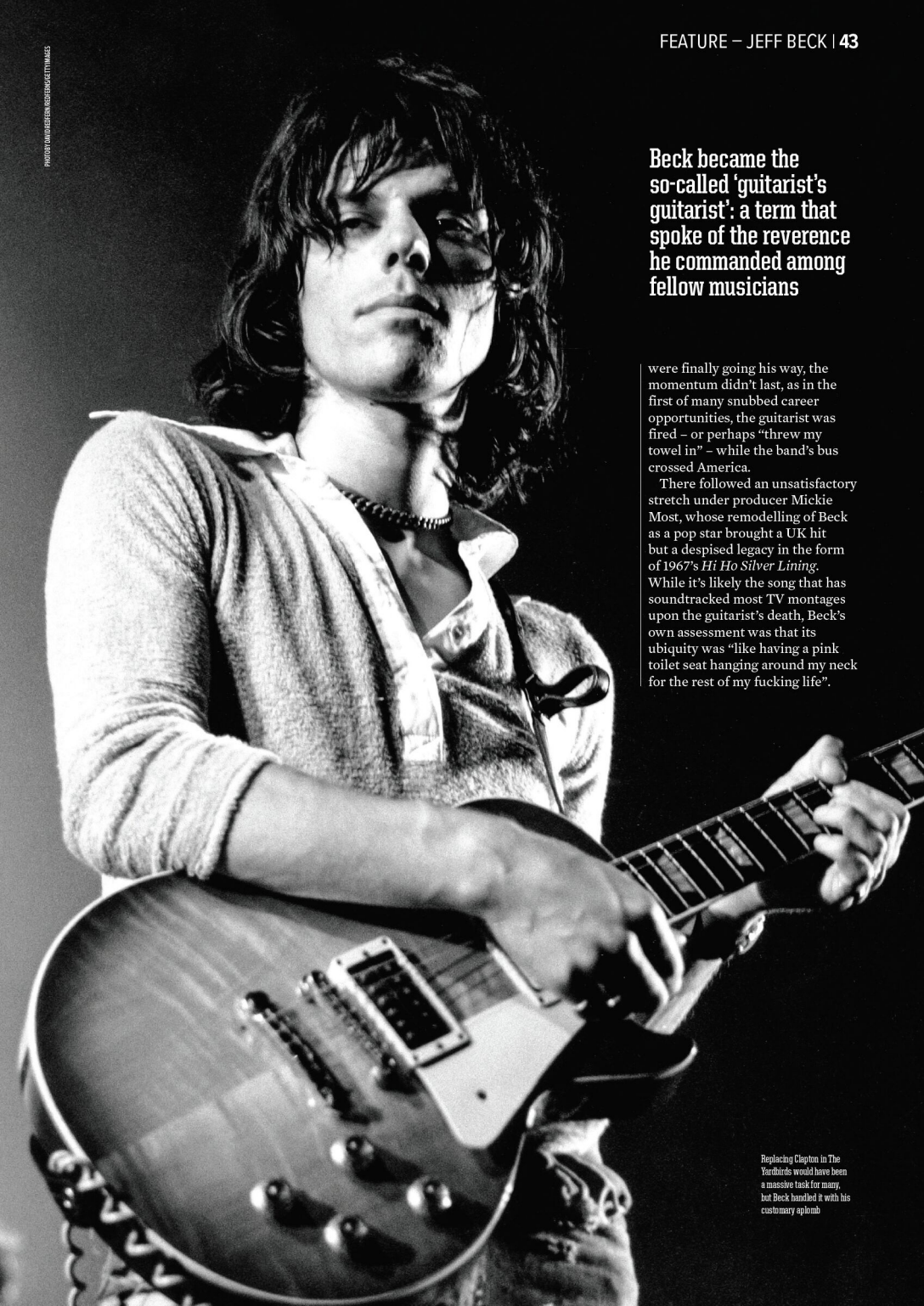
Having built his first cigar-box guitars, then fast-talked hire purchase companies into leasing him the real thing, Beck's studies at Wimbledon College Of Art bled into shifts with Screaming Lord Sutch and assorted nearlymen – The Nightshift, the Rumbles, the Tridents – before 1965 saw him handed the poisoned chalice of replacing Clapton in The Yardbirds.

Beck didn't blink. Having wiped his illustrious forebear from the fans' memories ("At The Marquee, I showed them what was what and got a standing ovation"), the newcomer set about bending The Yardbirds to his vision, introducing the feedback and fuzz of *Stroll On* and the Tone Bender-driven sitar emulation on *Heart Full Of Soul*. Yet the gear was moot. "With Jeff, it's all in his fingers," Clapton once said, and with the guitarist eschewing a plectrum, that was literally true. As an aside, those same digits would latterly be insured for £7 million ($12.5m) after Beck chopped off the tip of his index finger while making a stew.

"The six-stringed warrior is no longer here for us to admire the spell he could weave around our mortal emotions" JIMMY PAGE

Remarkably, Beck's maverick tendencies dovetailed with The Yardbirds' most successful commercial spell. But if things

PHOTOBY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTYIMAGES

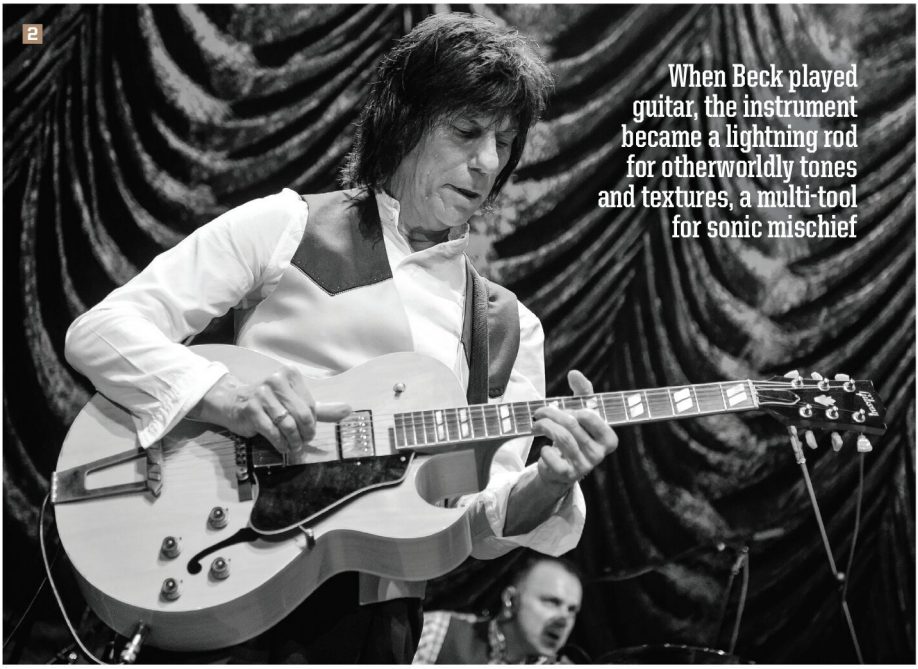


Beck became the so-called 'guitarist's guitarist': a term that spoke of the reverence he commanded among fellow musicians

were finally going his way, the momentum didn't last, as in the first of many snubbed career opportunities, the guitarist was fired – or perhaps "threw my towel in" – while the band's bus crossed America.

There followed an unsatisfactory stretch under producer Mickie Most, whose remodelling of Beck as a pop star brought a UK hit but a despised legacy in the form of 1967's *Hi Ho Silver Lining*. While it's likely the song that has soundtracked most TV montages upon the guitarist's death, Beck's own assessment was that its ubiquity was "like having a pink toilet seat hanging around my neck for the rest of my fucking life".

Replacing Clapton in The Yardbirds would have been a massive task for many, but Beck handled it with his customary aplomb



When Beck played guitar, the instrument became a lightning rod for otherworldly tones and textures, a multi-tool for sonic mischief

PHOTO BY KYLE GUSTAFSON/FOR THE WASHINGTON POST VIA GETTY IMAGES

Fortunately, Beck was on the brink of what many consider his best work, recruiting Rod Stewart and Ronnie Wood to flank him in The Jeff Beck Group and craft the heavy blues and nascent psychedelia of 1968's *Truth*. Much of Beck's greatest gold can be panned here and on 1969's sequel *Beck-Ola* – respectively, revisit the wah-fattened take on Willie Dixon's *I Ain't Superstitious* and the rollicking power-blues stomp of *Spanish Boots*.

But the personnel scattered shortly after Beck fired Wood and ducked the chance to play Woodstock. "Apparently, he'd got wind from somewhere of a rumour, which turned out to be false, that his missus was having an affair with the gardener," wrote Stewart, "so he was quite keen to go home."

It was typical of an artist who always took the path of most resistance – and frustrating to think where Beck's career might have flown with Stewart remaining his counterpoint on vocals. Likewise, had the guitarist played his cards differently, he could have joined The Rolling Stones in the mid-70s but chose instead to reject the stadium league in favour of the freeform joy he had witnessed on tour with John McLaughlin's Mahavishnu Orchestra.

"It was the refinement of McLaughlin that presented a way out for me," he told the *New Statesman*. "Arriving at the soundcheck and watching him and the sax player trading solos, I thought, 'This is me.' He has such knowledge of scales, and he tells the story within the scale. Playing with McLaughlin and then The Stones – dang, dang, dang – can you imagine?"

2. A life-long fan of Cliff Gallup from Gene Vincent's band, rockabilly was yet another facet of Jeff Beck's playing

3. Having been offered the chance to join The Rolling Stones, Jeff turned it down as he believed it would compromise his free-falling agenda

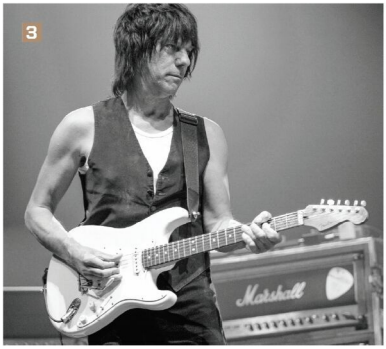


PHOTO BY HARRY HERO/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

While his accountant presumably howled, Beck's single-mindedness paid off with 1975's George Martin-produced *Blow By Blow*: an instrumental masterpiece of jazz-tinged adventurism, whose riches included the driving *Freeway Jam*, the talk box reboot of The Beatles' *She's A Woman*, and the keening leads of *Cause We've Ended As Lovers*. "Eric said to me, 'I'm telling you, if you don't sing, it's going to be tough,'" recalled Beck of an album that reached US No 4. "And it was tough. But then, I can turn around and say, '*Blow By Blow*, put that in your pipe and smoke it, mate.'"

From there, Beck seemed emboldened, and while his contemporaries softened into autopilot blues or curatorship of past glories, the guitarist's path as a recording artist became impossible to plot. His was a discography that could veer from 1973's dirtbox jam *Superstition* with Tim Bogert and Carmine Appice, through 1985's pop-leaning *Flash* album (helmed by Nile Rodgers) to the techno bent of 1999's *Who Else!*. And all spiced with guest spots that segued from the astonishing slide break on Jon Bon Jovi's *Blaze Of Glory* to Roger Waters' *Amused To Death* album. "I

(PHOTO BY CHRIS WALTER/WIRELIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES)

still don't know how he does it," said the former Pink Floyd bassist. "He's incredibly technically gifted in ways the rest of us can't even begin to think about."

Along the way, as it dawned that Beck would never be a megastar, he fell instead into his status as the so-called 'guitarist's guitarist': a term that spoke of the reverence he commanded among fellow musicians and hinted at his disinterest in the big-time. From Tony Iommi ("There will never be another") to Steve Hackett ("He made the electric guitar sing"), the old guard were unanimous in their praise upon Beck's passing.

It's notable, though, that from Johnny Marr to Jack White, the wider tributes spoke of a musician with a cross-generational thumbprint. "To say we are all devastated is an understatement," wrote Joe Bonamassa. "I simply cannot get my head around it. The greatest that ever touched a guitar."

Like any genius, Beck could be frustrating. He ditched genres and disbanded line-ups when there was gas left in the tank. His weakest instrumentals veered into muzak, while on stage, he could be inconsistent. "Beck takes a chance every night," Ritchie Blackmore once noted. "Sometimes he's absolutely useless and you wonder why he's got a name. Other times he pulls things off that sound like nothing you've heard before."

To witness Jeff Beck at full flight was to see a musician at one with his instrument in a state of pure expression

Yet it's the nights of wonder that we'll remember. To witness Beck at full flight was to see a musician at one with his instrument in a state of pure expression. And while the mainstream media's obituaries will be more lavish when the multi-platinum galacticos of the 60s check out, the connoisseurs know the death of Jeff Beck marks the exit of an all-time giant.

"Jeff was wild, he was unquantifiable and extraordinarily difficult to understand, but one of the greatest guitar geniuses the world has ever seen and will ever see," said Brian May in a video tribute. "He brought an amazing voice to rock music which will never, ever be emulated or equalled."

4. On stage with Billy Squier (left) and another of Jeff's all-time heroes, Les Paul

5. Bonamassa notes that Beck was "the greatest that ever touched a guitar..."

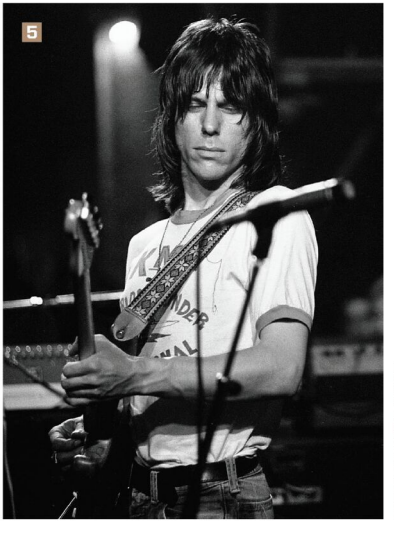


PHOTO BY MITSU ASAKUMA/SHINKO MUSIC/GETTY IMAGES

There's No Other Me

THE GUITAR WORLD HAS BEEN SHAKEN TO THE CORE AT THE LOSS OF ONE OF ITS MOST ORIGINAL VOICES AND MANY PLAYERS WANTED TO SHARE A PERSONAL NOTE OF LOSS, AN ANECDOTE, OR A TRIBUTE TO A MAN WHO PLAYED SUCH AN IMPORTANT ROLE IN THEIR MUSICAL LIVES

COMPILED BY DAVID MEAD

MARTIN BARRE

"I first met Jeff when I was recording music with Hilton Valentine of The Animals in around 1967 in London. We didn't know he was putting a solo on the song, so when he walked through the studio, my jaw hit the floor. He borrowed my guitar, found an old amp in a corner of the room and the room came alive!

"Tull played with Jeff and Rod Stewart in the States in 1969 and, again, I was very much in awe of his presence. To hear him play and then have to follow on the same stage was one of the hardest lessons that I ever learnt. He inspired me and, unknowingly, helped me come to terms with performing alongside the best musicians on the planet.

"To be unique in the world of guitar playing is a very special quality and he had that and more. It speaks volumes that he could be immediately recognised by his sound, his technique and his understated approach to music. I share his passion for vintage cars, but will never come close to sharing his ability to create the magic and majesty he had playing guitar. Jeff took English rock guitar to the States and the impact he created will reverberate forever."

1

PHOTO BY: MICK HUTSON/REDFERNS

JENNIFER BATTEN

"We were playing a double bill in Rio with Wayne Shorter. We were in the middle of the glorious *Where Were You* duet – just the two of us. I was triggering Tony Hymas-esque synth pads when Jeff broke a string. His tech always had an eye on him and immediately brought him a new guitar while I sustained a chord. He started to carry on with the song when the new guitar went belly up with a horrendous jack buzz. He got so upset with the failure because he was so deeply emotionally invested in the tune, that he took off the faulty guitar and smashed it into the stage. There were seconds there where my life flashed before my eyes as I once again sustained the harmony wondering what came next, until he stormed off the stage in defeat.

"I'd heard about this behaviour from his early years but had never been a part of it. Soon it was obvious it was over and I put down my guitar and headed backstage to find him extremely upset. It's *that* kind of vested emotion and sensitivity that made him the best vessel for music possible. I *do* know how lucky I was to have been a part of his life and music."

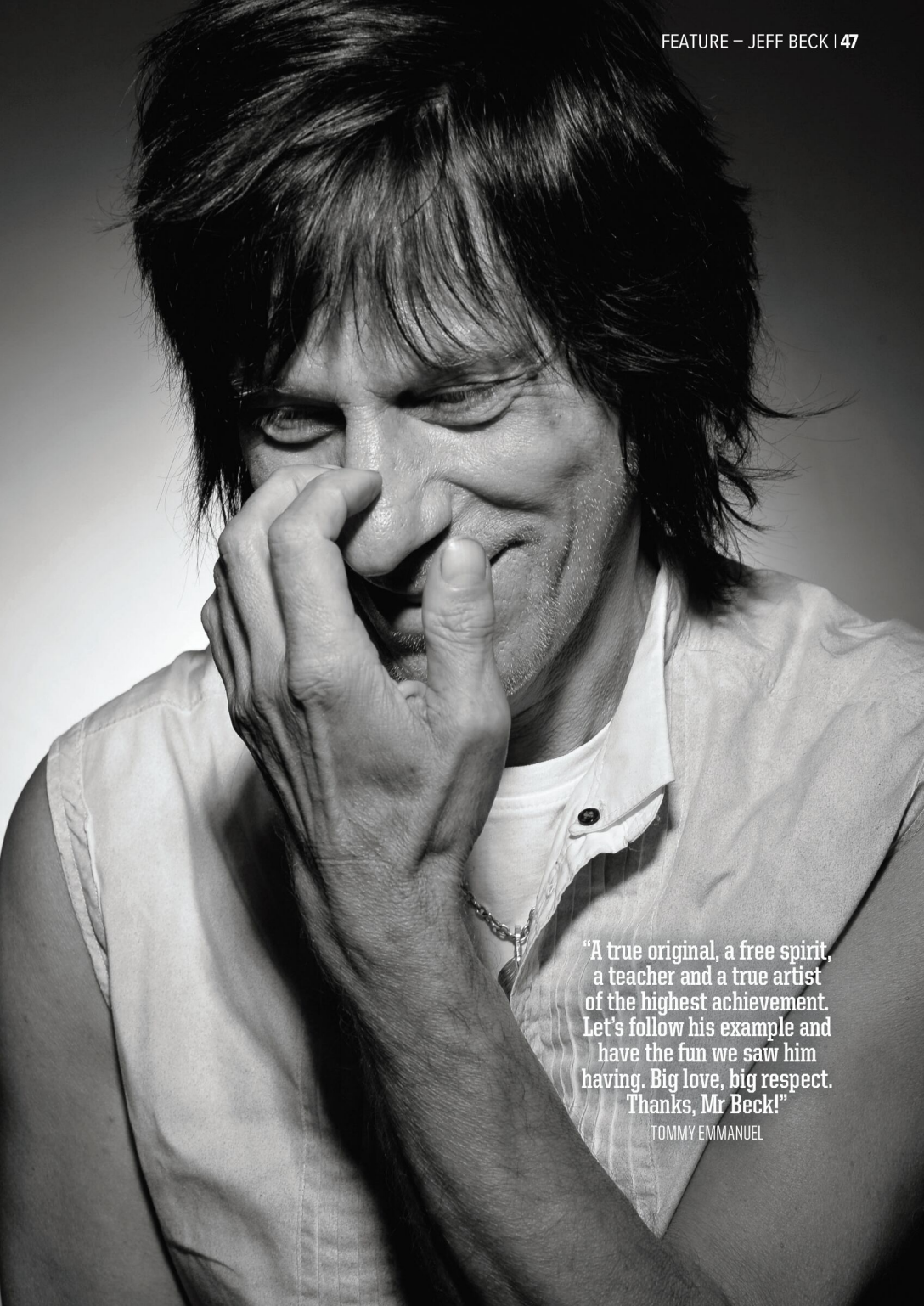
"Jeff Beck was a miracle... But the thing that struck me the most was his teenage-like sense of humour. He loved to laugh" STEVE VAI

1. Jennifer Batten played guitar and guitar synth in Beck's touring band from 1999 to 2001 and appears on the studio albums *Who Else!* and *You Had It Coming*

JOE BONAMASSA

"Without Jeff Beck, none of us would play the guitar the way we do. My introduction to the blues was through the song *Let Me Love You* off a record called *Truth* that was recorded at Abbey Road Studios in 1968. I have met Jeff a few times and he was always gracious and funny, but, most importantly, he was such a brilliant musician."

PHOTO BY: JOR/SESSIONS



"A true original, a free spirit, a teacher and a true artist of the highest achievement. Let's follow his example and have the fun we saw him having. Big love, big respect. Thanks, Mr Beck!"

TOMMY EMMANUEL

PHOTO BY LYLE A. WASMAN/GETTY IMAGES

2. Rockabilly guitarist (and, as it turns out, fellow muscle car enthusiast) Darrel Higham on stage with Beck at the Cadillac Palace Chicago in 2011

3. Jeff joins Brian May on stage to celebrate Freddie Mercury's 65th birthday at the 'Freddie For A Day' concert at London's Savoy Hotel on 5 September 2011

TOMMY EMMANUEL

"It was my brother, Phil, who brought my attention to the wonders of Jeff Beck. He sat me down in front of his stereo, turned on *Blow By Blow* and blew my mind, causing me to search for a better tone, better ideas, to find every Beck recording I could find and soak it into my body and soul. Nobody has ever, will ever, play guitar like Beck. A true original, a free spirit, a teacher and a true artist of the highest achievement! Every time I've seen him play I saw that he gave it all for his audience and for his own needs. He left it *all* out there. Let's follow his example and have the fun we saw him having. Big love, big respect. Thanks, Mr Beck!"

JOHN ETHERIDGE

"I saw Jeff Beck for the first time just after he'd joined The Yardbirds in 1965 at the Windsor Ricky Tick. He was playing a Telecaster with Vox AC30. The Yardbirds specialised in extended 'freak out' jams that would build to a furious crescendo. This suited Jeff, I think. He was basically the same player as in 2022 – the combination of bluesiness, tangential phrasing, feedback, slide, subversive melodic turns was all there. He wanted to mess up your expectations! After that I saw him many times, with the great group with Rod Stewart, the *There And Back* tour and most recently at The O2.

"I did actually play alongside him at The Secret Policeman's Other Ball in 1981. He was supposedly playing *Cause We've Ended As Lovers* with Clapton as a duet. But in the rehearsal, when it came to the D/C chord in the bridge, Eric wasn't up for it and pointed at me to say, 'You do it.' So I did. (I'm a vague silhouette on a YouTube clip!) Jeff was playing the Tele, sounded fantastic and with so little gear – a Roland Space Echo and Boss Super Overdrive. There can never be anyone like that again."

STEVE HACKETT

"Jeff Beck's passing is a huge loss. He was the greatest innovator of our time and a huge influence on myself and many others. He transformed the guitar into a multi-faceted instrument, sometimes sounding like a voice, at other times like a sax with his explosive approach and complete mastery of tone. He constantly blew us all away with each new offering. His original use of distortion and echo often gave an eerie quality. Just when you thought the guitar could do no more, he would manage to push the boundaries further each time. He could thrill you, make you laugh, spook you and challenge you to stretch beyond your own limitations. Whether he was playing a Les Paul or a Stratocaster, the sound was always uniquely his own. There will never be another like him."

"Without Jeff Beck, none of us would play the guitar the way we do. He was gracious, funny... such a brilliant musician" JOE BONAMASSA

DARREL HIGHAM

"Jeff had not long bought a new Corvette. It was a modern monster of a car. I had poodled down to Jeff's house in my '61 Ford Zodiac and Jeff was laughing at how slow it was. He said, 'Come on, jump in my new car and I'll take you for a spin around the country lanes.' So in I got and immediately Jeff floored this beast and we went hurtling down the lanes around his village. I was absolutely terrified, genuinely terrified at that. He pulled over and said, 'Right, your turn.' I was horrified that he wanted me to drive this bloody thing and politely declined. He wouldn't have it and eventually I got out of the passenger seat and sat behind the wheel. I very gingerly pulled out of the lay-by and was driving like a blind old man when Jeff shouted over at me, 'Floor it, for fuck's sake.' So I did and terrified myself even more."

STEVE LUKATHER

"I have said this many times in my life: that I think Jeff was God's guitar player. Now he really is. Too soon. His playing hit me so hard and has stayed with me my whole life. No-one will *ever* be close to him. The most original voice on guitar I have ever heard and loved by us all. We did a few tours together years ago in Japan and I got to see it up close every night. Blew minds every time. Ask any of us guitar players who *the* man is: the answer is always Jeff Beck. I am honoured I could call him an old friend as well. He shall be so missed."

PHOTO BY DAVE M. BENETT/GETTY IMAGES

"His playing made the guitar a voice in the fullest meaning of the word – in his hands it could communicate every emotion"

BRIAN MAY

JOHN MCLAUGHLIN

"Yet another immense loss. Jeff was one of the greatest guitarists ever. He was beyond genre, simply a marvellous guitarist. Not only, he was also a delightful human being. I'm grieving..."

HANK MARVIN

"*Where Were You* by Jeff Beck is a haunting composition, beautifully played. Go the whammy bar! I've never tried it – I know my limitations. But it was really inspirational, reaffirming how expressive a Strat can be in the right hands. Thank you, Jeff."

BRIAN MAY

"I feel a profound sadness at losing him from our lives – and a profound regret at not staying closer the last few years. Jeff was a master magician, mysterious and unfathomable. Much more than a guitar player, he made the guitar into what sounded like a different instrument altogether. His playing made the guitar a voice in the fullest meaning of the word – in his hands it could communicate every emotion. I just don't have the words to describe what a presence he was for us all and I will never really understand how he did what he did. I've often felt it must have been similar to watching Mozart at work, and wondering where that genius came from. Jeff's exquisite tone, expression and invention will haunt us all forever."

DOMINIC MILLER

"I got to know Jeff when he opened for us on Sting's *Brand New Day* tour of 2000. I stood side stage every night marvelling at the sounds coming from his hands, which were nothing short of supernatural. He was also a very kind man and extremely funny. It's almost unthinkable that we'll never hear him play again in real time. The guitar community bows its head."

PHOTO BY WWW.CHRISTOPHEROMBART-PHOTOGRAPHY.COM

4

PHOTO BY THEO WARGO/WIREIMAGE/GETTY IMAGES

"Just when you thought the guitar could do no more, he would manage to push the boundaries further each time" STEVE HACKETT

4. Jeff Beck opened for Sting back in 2000 where Dominic Miller would watch the master from the side of the stage every night. Here, Beck joins Sting on stage at Madison Square Garden in 2009

JOE SATRIANI

"Jeff Beck's music is part of my foundation as a guitarist. He was an innovator whose musicianship will always be a source of joy and inspiration for me."

MARTIN TAYLOR

"When I was in Bill Wyman's Rhythm Kings, we played a concert at the Royal Festival Hall and Ronnie Wood was on it. As I was heading back to the stage after soundcheck, Ronnie was standing there with Jeff and he introduced us and we started talking about jazz guitar. I was playing in London about a week after that at a theatre in Bloomsbury and Jeff came along and I figured he was gonna sit in because when I got there to do the soundcheck, there was a small Marshall amp and a white Strat on the stage! So I played a solo set, and then he came up and we played *Goodbye Pork Pie Hat*. I remember asking him about playing with Stevie Wonder on the *Talking Book* album. He told me that he went to the studio in New York, sat down and played that famous solo on *Lookin' For Another Pure Love* and when Stevie says, 'Do it, Jeff...' during the solo, Jeff told me, 'I knew that my career was safe forever.'"

STEVE VAI

"Jeff Beck was a miracle. I see him as the chosen one. His touch on the instrument created profoundly beautiful soundscapes that held the heart of the listener in its intoxicating heaven. No other guitar player has evolved so dramatically past their prime as he did, and at 78 years of age he played as if he was still in his prime. It's impossible to quantify his hallucinogenic wizardry. I was fortunate enough to have met him four or five times and he was always so kind, warm and engaging. But the thing that struck me the most was his teenage-like sense of humour. He loved to laugh. Jeff was 78 but also 17."

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The Guitars

JEFF BECK WAS A STRAT MAN THROUGH AND THROUGH, BUT THIS WASN'T TO THE AVOIDANCE OF ALL OTHER MODELS. AUTHOR AND GUITAR HISTORIAN TONY BACON RECOUNTS HIS PAST CONVERSATIONS WITH BECK AS HE CHARTS THE VARIOUS SIX-STRINGS THAT WERE INSTRUMENTAL IN HIS CAREER

Think of Jeff Beck, guitar in hand, and you might well think Strat. Not a surprise, given that was his main instrument for the last 40 or so years of his long career. We talked about this as Jeff and I sat in the kitchen of his 16th century Sussex pile enjoying a nice cup of tea and a chat about guitars, one of his favourite subjects.

He reflected on the timeless qualities of a Strat. "You don't get kids saying, 'What's that old guitar? Ain't you got a new one?' It still looks futuristic," he said, smiling at the idea, "and it's still an unbeatable shape, as is the Tele. I don't think you can improve on those two guitars – the all-time great rock guitars."

In fact, he added, the Strat was to blame for his early conversion to the power of rock. "The reason I left school was because of that guitar. I mean, that is brain damage when you're a kid of 14 and you see something like that. It's just a piece of equipment that I dreamed about touching, never mind owning. The first day I stood staring at one in a London shop, I just went into a trance – and I got the wrong bus home, just dreaming about it. You know? It blew my brains apart, and it's never been any different since. It's taken me all round the world and given me everything I've got – just that Strat, really. So it is a particular favourite of mine."

Beck remained a Strat evangelist, playing a good number of the things through the years. And this continuing allegiance must have helped Fender shift countless units, too, especially after his signature model was added to the line. At first, he'd vetoed the idea and the original design evolved into Fender's Strat Plus of 1987, but the Jeff Beck Stratocaster, not dissimilar to the Plus, finally appeared four years later.

And before the Strat? Did you say Telecaster, Esquire, Les Paul? Well, yes – but there was a Strat very early on for the young Geoffrey. As he weaved in and out of teenage bands, one of his earliest electrics was a Strat, back in 1961 or so. "It was a '60 sunburst, which I painted pink or lavender," he recalled. "I remember it split in two – this big split appeared along the back of it because I'd whacked something with it. But I wanted a car and had to sell it. So, as I travelled on the train to sell it, I touched up the split with my girlfriend's nail varnish. It matched perfectly! Fantastic story, eh? And they never spotted it."

"The reason I left school was because of that [Strat]. The first day I saw one in a London shop, I just went into a trance" JEFF BECK

1. Jeff in rehearsals with The Yardbirds for TV show *Ready Steady Go!* in 1965, playing a Fender Esquire with a modded body. It was purchased that year from John Walker of The Walker Brothers for £75 (about $135), according to Jeff

PHOTO BY STANLEY BIELECKI/ASPI/GETTY IMAGES

2. Above: Jeff performs with an early version of his signature Strat in the 90s. Its features were a variation on the Strat Plus/Plus Ultra template (left) and were chosen to support Jeff's dynamic style, especially his expressive use of the whammy bar and fluid, sustaining lead tones. It was the culmination of his life-long love for the model

PHOTO BY DAVID REDFERN/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

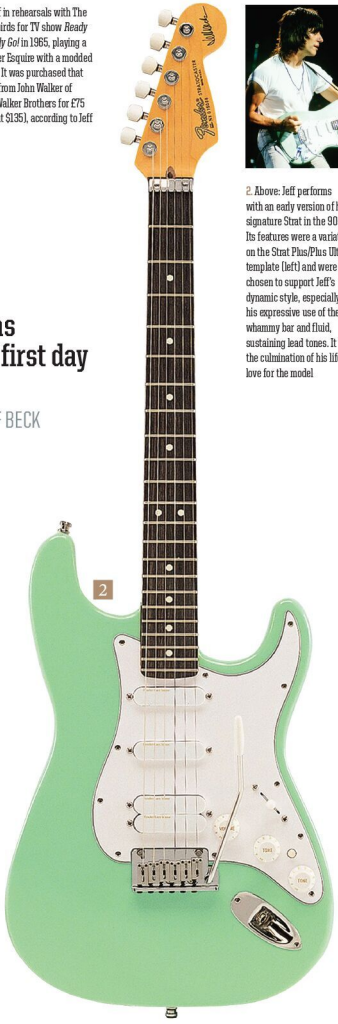


PHOTO BY NIGEL OSBOURNE/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

> "I used to spin the Esquire around on top of the amp and change the speed of the echo while it was feeding back. Total lunacy!" JEFF BECK

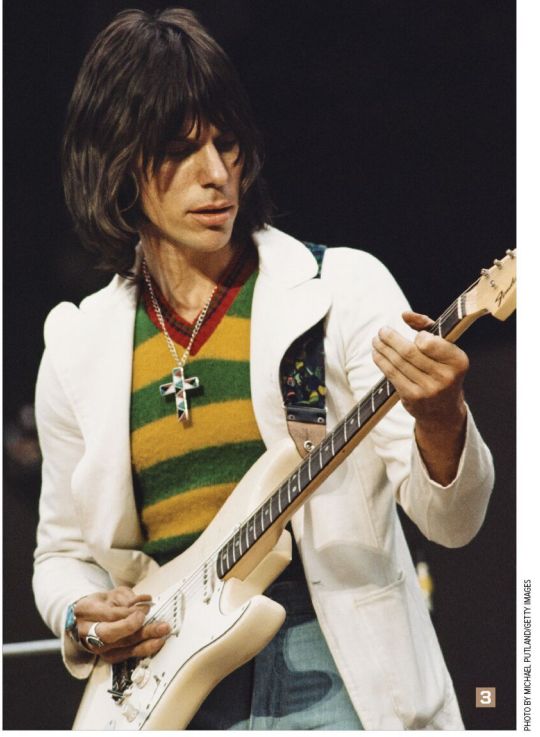


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

3. Jeff performing with hard rock supergroup Beck, Bogert & Appice in London in 1972. The Strat would become his 'home', but many still love his work with a Les Paul

THE GUY CAN'T HELP IT

Another Fender seed was planted in 1956, when Jeff went to the local cinema after school to see *The Girl Can't Help It*, which he reckoned was the most pivotal film of his early life. He sat slack-jawed in the Sutton Granada as Little Richard's band performed – and there at the back was a guy playing a lovely battered old Tele. Then on came Gene Vincent & His Blue Caps, and now on the big screen some teenage blonde kid was playing an Esquire. "It was just mouth-watering for us!" he remembered.

Fast forward to 1965, and he found himself playing a red Telecaster, passed on from the outgoing Eric Clapton when Jeff joined The Yardbirds. It was, he remembered, "a terrible guitar", and soon he began looking around for something better. 'John Owen, a friend of mine, had a Telecaster. I would ogle this thing, and I spent more time playing it than he did. Then I borrowed it – and I never gave it back."

There was more to the Tele now than a memory of Little Richard. "It was because of the sound that Ricky Nelson's records had," he explained. "We all thought that was a Telecaster. We weren't sure because there was no information on the records at all. I don't know who told us, but we all assumed it was a Tele because it sounded so close when we plugged in our one: on the back pickup it sounded a lot like James Burton."

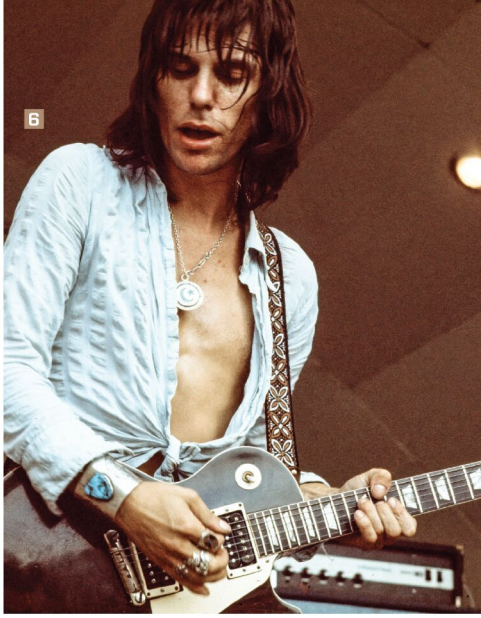
He got an Esquire soon afterwards. "I bought my first one from John Walker. We were doing a package tour with The Walker Brothers in 1965, and the first thing I saw at rehearsals was this really good-looking pair of brothers, and one had an Esquire with a white pickguard and blonde neck. And I wanted the blonde neck! Because you couldn't get that after a certain run – they changed it to rosewood. I said, 'I want that guitar.' He said, 'Oh, 75 quid.' Give over! They're only about 85 quid new! And his had been shaved into a contoured body. I bought it anyway."

The two Fenders served him well during his short stay in The Yardbirds. Many of the studio cuts he made with them have Jeff creating inventive little cameos that still have the power to surprise and delight. Take the remarkable *Shapes Of Things*, for which he used his Esquire at Chess studios in Chicago.

"We were all completely blown away with the way they did things there," he said. "The drum sound was great, and everything was like a dream come true. Marshall Chess was there, and the guys that used to record Muddy Waters. I was standing right next to an AC30

4. The Yardbirds perform again on *Ready Steady Go!* in 1965 (from left to right): Jim McCarty, Jeff Beck, Keith Relf, Paul Samwell-Smith and Chris Dreja

PHOTO BY JOHN RODGERS/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES



5. Beck on stage with The Yardbirds in 1966 pictured with '59 Burst with an added black pickguard; it was later damaged and crudely refinished

6. Beck performing at Crystal Palace Bowl, London in 1972 with the famous 'oxblood' Les Paul he converted from a 50s Goldtop

on a chair, which I used so that I could easily reach the controls. I just moved around to get the right noise, you know? It was madness: pure experimentation. I used to spin the Esquire around on top of the amp and change the speed of the echo while it was feeding back. Total lunacy! I used to try and break it – and I never could."

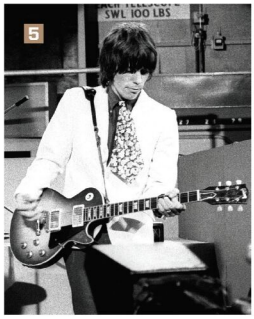


PHOTO BY: JAN OLOFSSON/REDFERNS/GETTY IMAGES

LESS 'PAUL

Toward the end of The Yardbirds, he began playing a Les Paul, which he remembered as a '59 Burst with an added black pickguard bought in London for about £175 ($314). It's on *Jeff's Boogie*, and on tracks such as *Beck's Bolero* on *Truth* – two humbling lessons in exactly how many sounds can be had from one Les Paul, one amplifier, two hands and a unique guitar master.

> **"The Strat responded more to my aggressive playing than the Les Paul, which sounds dreadful if you start hitting it"** JEFF BECK

That first Les Paul of Jeff's was soon in the wars, smashed almost fatally during a US tour. Suitably repaired, the guitar continued to serve him for a while, and soon he removed its finish. "I saw a pale guitar in a book," he recalled, "so I stripped off the sunburst to make it look like that. I went to a carpentry shop in Nine Elms [South London] and bought some paint stripper. I'd been a painter in the car business, so I knew what I was doing. I didn't want it to look shiny."

Jeff moved through several more Lesters, including a converted mid-50s Goldtop with a dark-brown refin that Jeff called oxblood. That guitar turned up in a few places on the exquisite jazz-rock album *Blow By Blow*, recorded with George Martin toward the end of 1974. But by then Jeff's loyalty had switched almost entirely to Strats.

"I think it was when we did the *Beck-Ola* album that I got fed up with the sound of the Les Paul," he said. "In the studio, the Les Paul didn't sound a lot different from the John Mayall's Bluesbreakers. Lovely sound, but every track ends up sounding very similar. The Strat seemed to respond more to my aggressive playing than the Les Paul, which just sounds dreadful if you start hitting it."

For *Blow By Blow*, he thought the Les Paul ought to be more attuned to jazz-rock. "It was partly because of George Martin that I used it; his ears were having a bit of trouble handling the raucous screaming that I was doing. George would flinch and start walking around and making tea and things. He likes good mellow sounds. So I thought, 'Well, there's no point in making the guy suffer. I may as well play melodically. And then maybe I'll come back one night and scrub over it with the Strat.' Eventually, when I started to do *Freeway Jam* and stuff like that, and I needed to go crazy, I decided the Strat was more my tool, you know?"

7. Aerosmith guitarist, Joe Perry looks on earnestly as Jeff Beck runs through some licks on his Strat backstage in 1976

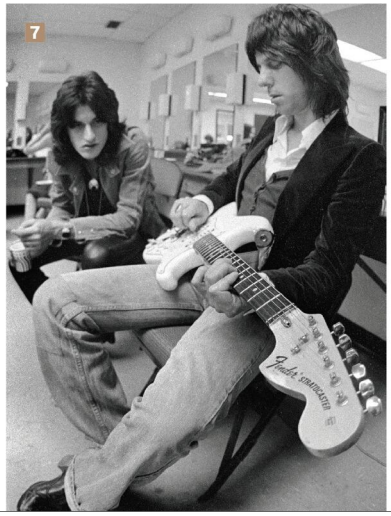


PHOTO BY MICHAEL PUTLAND/GETTY IMAGES

It certainly was. No doubt you'll have your own favourites from among the many gigs and records Jeff played and made with a Strat since his 70s conversion. For such an inspirational risk-taker, there were inevitable and relatively brief infatuations along the way – a 'Tele-Gib' mash-up here, a Jackson or two there – but Strats remained his main love. Back in the kitchen, meanwhile, with another cuppa lined up, Jeff began to talk about the way electric guitars in the olden days were often misunderstood by people who should have known better.

"I remember some classical guitarist," he recalled, "he's on TV, and he's saying, 'Oh, this electric guitar means nothing. You could have any old shape bit of wood and pickup – they all sound the same.' Complete bollocks. Complete and utter rubbish! To him, they may all sound the same. But we know differently."

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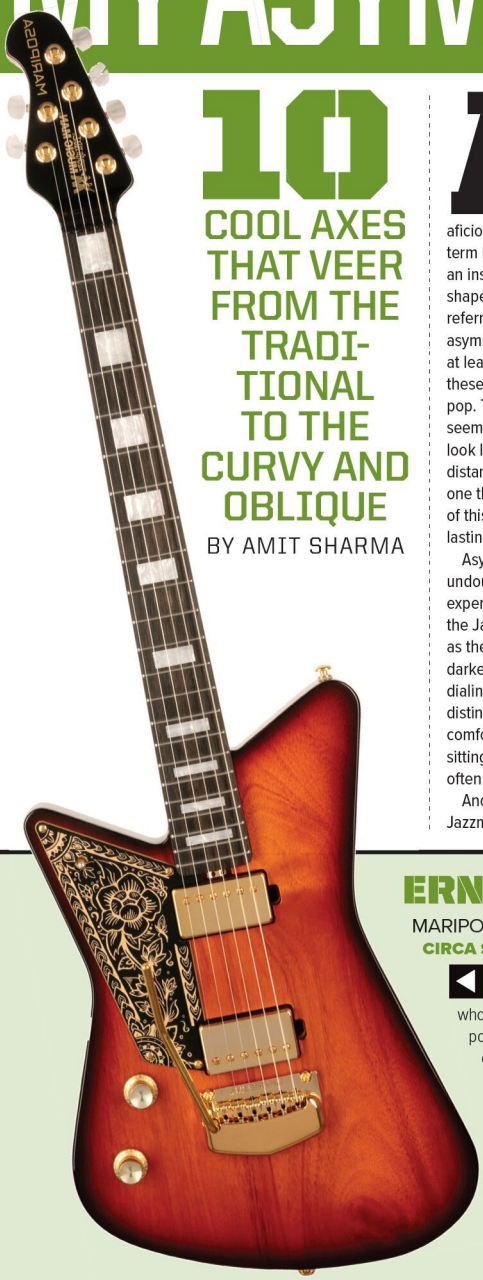
MY ASYMMETRICAL



10 COOL AXES THAT VEER FROM THE TRADITIONAL TO THE CURVY AND OBLIQUE

BY AMIT SHARMA

AN OFFSET GUITAR can look like so many different things. As any Jaguar, Firebird or Iceman aficionado will happily tell you, the term lends itself to the "waist" of an instrument rather than its overall shape or cutaways, specifically referring to how its lower half is asymmetrical, tilted or angled. Which, at least at first glance, is what makes these distinguished guitars really pop. To some, such guitars might seem futuristic; to others, they might look like ancient remnants of a long-distant past. Regardless of your take, one thing's for certain: Instruments of this ilk never fail to leave a long-lasting impression.

Asymmetrical six-strings are undoubtedly an area of great expertise for Fender, who released the Jazzmaster way back in 1958 as their answer to the thicker and darker tones bebop guitarists were dialing in through their Gibsons. Its distinct body shape also afforded a comfortable playing experience while sitting down, as guitarists of that ilk often would be.

And yet, despite its name, the Jazzmaster would end up finding popularity well outside of its intended market, initially with treble-driven surf rock musicians, and then the post-punk, Britrock and alternative movements that followed, eventually becoming the instrument of choice for all kinds of thrill-seekers and non-conformists. Then, of course, there are the other Fender innovations like the Jaguar, Mustang and Duo-Sonic, each of which presents its own unique sense of charm and take on tone.

That's just scratching the surface. There's been many a cult classic produced by other companies too, from the Gibson Firebird and the Ghost-approved Gibson RD to the Paul Stanley-affiliated Ibanez Iceman, which, in turn, helped inspire Meshuggah's eight-string Stoneman and Paul Gilbert's reversed Fireman. In more recent years, offsets have become big business for all kinds of brands, with some truly remarkable models coming from the likes of Ernie Ball Music Man, PRS and Reverend, including signatures co-designed by alternative guitar heroes like Omar Rodríguez-López and Billy Corgan. Here's a closer look at 10 of our favorites that are available right now.

ERNIE BALL MUSIC MAN

MARIPOSA SAHARA SUNSET

CIRCA $5,700, music-man.com

Named after the Spanish word for butterfly, the Mariposa made its debut in 2019 as the new signature instrument for Omar Rodríguez-López, whose music in At the Drive-In and the Mars Volta ended up defining an era of post-hardcore and modern shoegaze. This latest edition in Sahara Sunset could be our favorite yet, with its orangey glow complimented by the custom floral pickguard and gold hardware, pairing a lightweight okoume body with a roasted maple neck and ebony fingerboard. While he's known using for sophisticated rigs and elaborate pedalboards to venture way beyond the typical confines of guitar noise, his instrument of choice is actually a rather classic affair — with a three-way selector controlling two custom-voiced and high-output EBMM humbuckers, as well as two volume controls. It's the perfect workhorse to get writing your own "One Armed Scissor," "Concertina" and "Roulette Dares (The Haunt Of)."

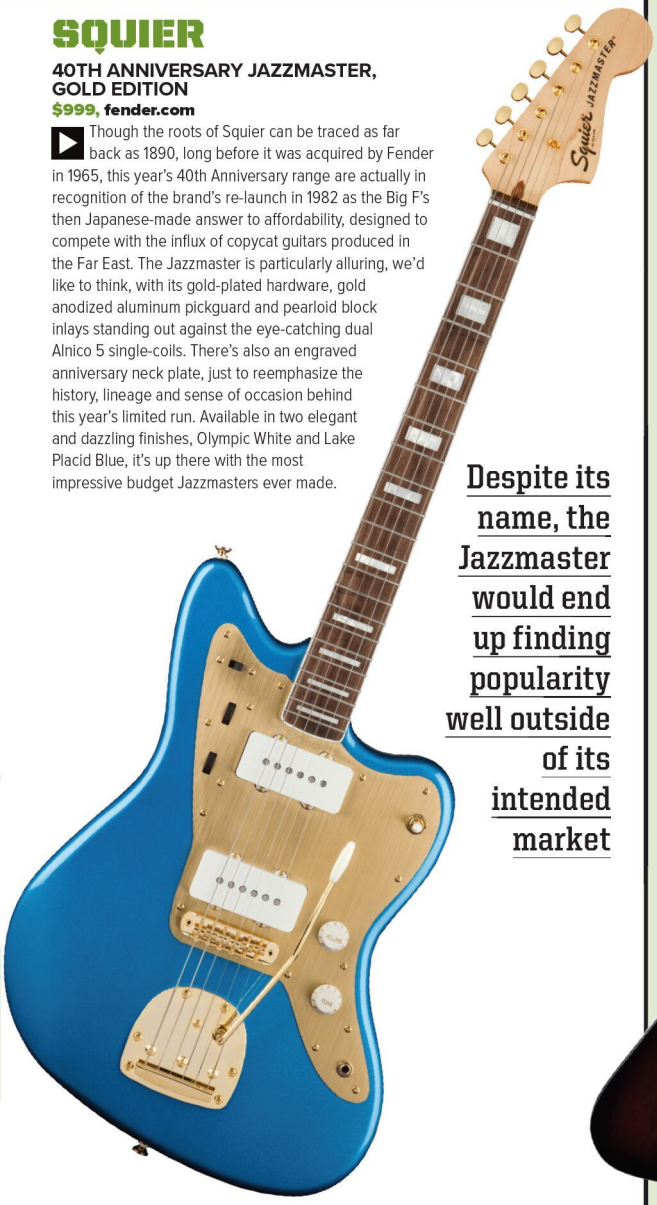
L ROMANCE

SQUIER

40TH ANNIVERSARY JAZZMASTER, GOLD EDITION

$999, fender.com

Though the roots of Squier can be traced as far back as 1890, long before it was acquired by Fender in 1965, this year's 40th Anniversary range are actually in recognition of the brand's re-launch in 1982 as the Big F's then Japanese-made answer to affordability, designed to compete with the influx of copycat guitars produced in the Far East. The Jazzmaster is particularly alluring, we'd like to think, with its gold-plated hardware, gold anodized aluminum pickguard and pearloid block inlays standing out against the eye-catching dual Alnico 5 single-coils. There's also an engraved anniversary neck plate, just to reemphasize the history, lineage and sense of occasion behind this year's limited run. Available in two elegant and dazzling finishes, Olympic White and Lake Placid Blue, it's up there with the most impressive budget Jazzmasters ever made.



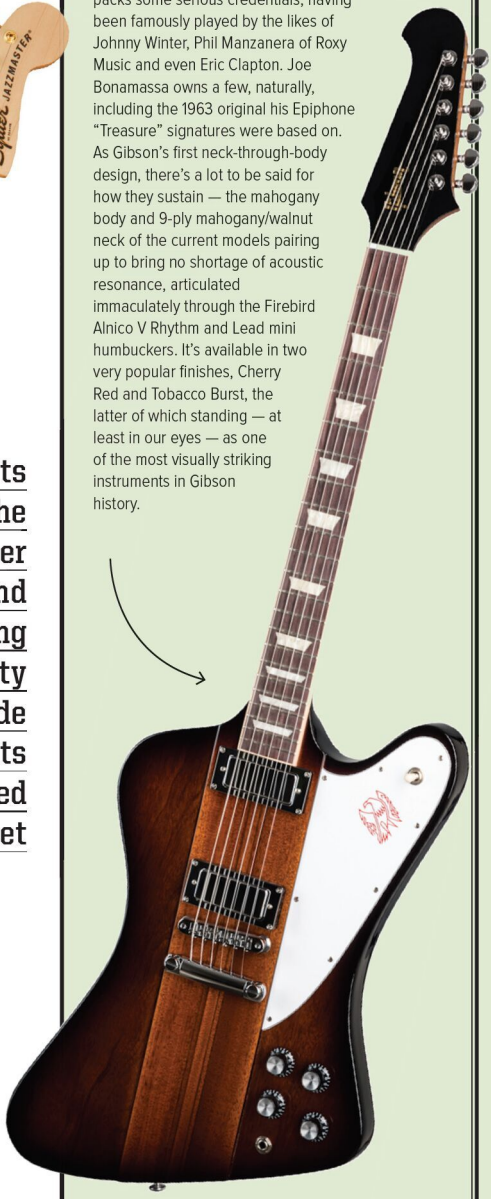
Despite its name, the Jazzmaster would end up finding popularity well outside of its intended market

GIBSON

FIREBIRD TOBACCO BURST

$3,599, gibson.com

Though it may not be as deeply ingrained into rock 'n' roll history as the storied Les Paul or SG, the reverse-bodied Firebird still packs some serious credentials, having been famously played by the likes of Johnny Winter, Phil Manzanera of Roxy Music and even Eric Clapton. Joe Bonamassa owns a few, naturally, including the 1963 original his Epiphone "Treasure" signatures were based on. As Gibson's first neck-through-body design, there's a lot to be said for how they sustain — the mahogany body and 9-ply mahogany/walnut neck of the current models pairing up to bring no shortage of acoustic resonance, articulated immaculately through the Firebird Alnico V Rhythm and Lead mini humbuckers. It's available in two very popular finishes, Cherry Red and Tobacco Burst, the latter of which standing — at least in our eyes — as one of the most visually striking instruments in Gibson history.



DUESENBERG

PALOMA

$4,399, duesenberg.de

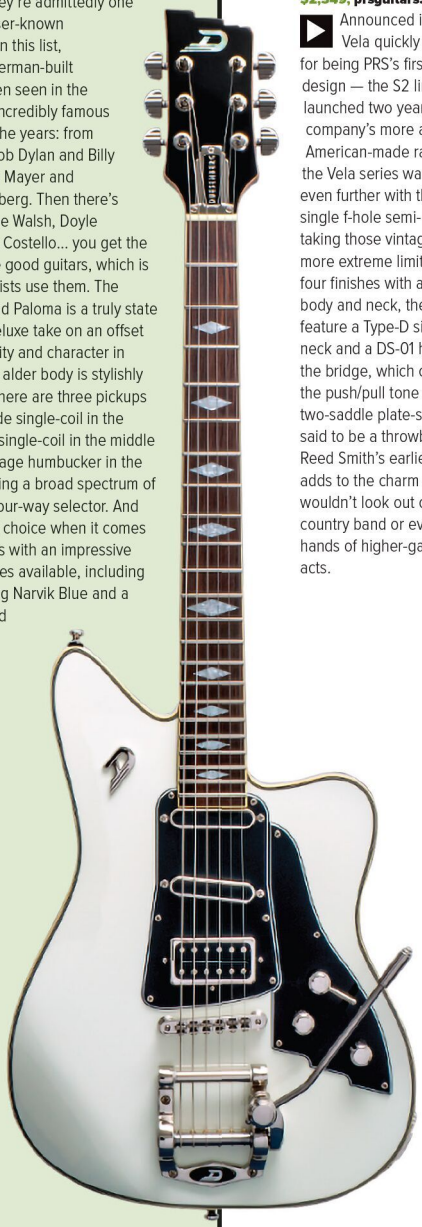
Though they're admittedly one of the lesser-known manufacturers on this list, Duesenberg's German-built guitars have been seen in the hands of some incredibly famous musicians over the years: from Ronnie Wood, Bob Dylan and Billy Gibbons to John Mayer and Carmen Vandenberg. Then there's Chris Cornell, Joe Walsh, Doyle Bramhall II, Elvis Costello... you get the idea. They make good guitars, which is why good guitarists use them. The beautifully curved Paloma is a truly state of the art and deluxe take on an offset — with personality and character in abundance. The alder body is stylishly contoured and there are three pickups — an Alnico Blade single-coil in the neck, a Pearlito single-coil in the middle and a GrandVintage humbucker in the bridge — providing a broad spectrum of sounds via the four-way selector. And there's plenty of choice when it comes to color schemes with an impressive total of six finishes available, including a mouth-watering Narvik Blue and a head-turning Red Sparkle.

PRS

S2 VELA SEMI-HOLLOW SATIN

$2,349, prsguitars.com

Announced in 2015, the S2 Vela quickly stole headlines for being PRS's first-ever offset design — the S2 line having been launched two years prior as the company's more affordable American-made range. In 2019, the Vela series was expanded even further with the addition of a single f-hole semi-hollow model, taking those vintage influences to more extreme limits. Available in four finishes with a mahogany body and neck, the guitars feature a Type-D single-coil in the neck and a DS-01 humbucker in the bridge, which can be split via the push/pull tone control. The two-saddle plate-style bridge is said to be a throwback to Paul Reed Smith's earliest designs and adds to the charm of a guitar that wouldn't look out of place with a country band or even in the hands of higher-gain hard rock acts.



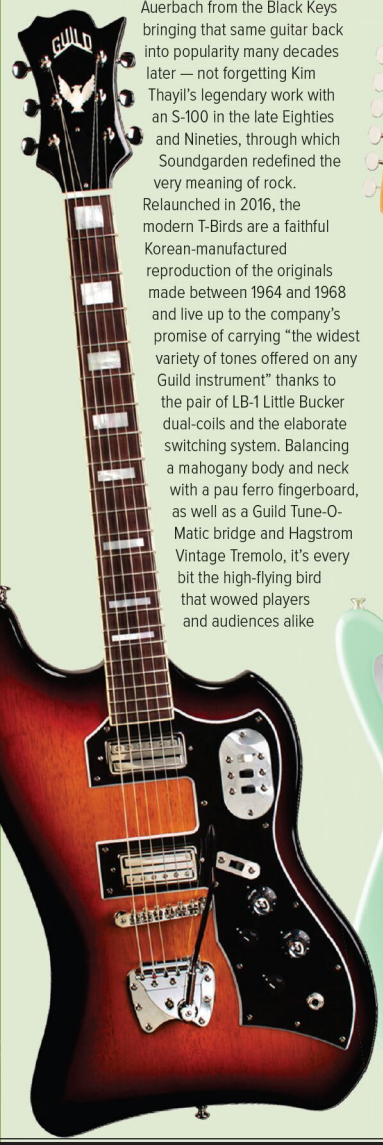
In 2015, the S2 Vela stole headlines for being PRS's first-ever offset design. In 2019, the Vela series was expanded even further

GUILD

S-200 T-BIRD

$1,899, guildguitars.com

It would be fair to say Guild are known for their acoustics, first and foremost. But their electrics have made history too, from Muddy Waters rocking the S-200 T-Bird in the mid Sixties to Dan Auerbach from the Black Keys bringing that same guitar back into popularity many decades later — not forgetting Kim Thayil's legendary work with an S-100 in the late Eighties and Nineties, through which Soundgarden redefined the very meaning of rock. Relaunched in 2016, the modern T-Birds are a faithful Korean-manufactured reproduction of the originals made between 1964 and 1968 and live up to the company's promise of carrying "the widest variety of tones offered on any Guild instrument" thanks to the pair of LB-1 Little Bucker dual-coils and the elaborate switching system. Balancing a mahogany body and neck with a pau ferro fingerboard, as well as a Guild Tune-O-Matic bridge and Hagstrom Vintage Tremolo, it's every bit the high-flying bird that wowed players and audiences alike

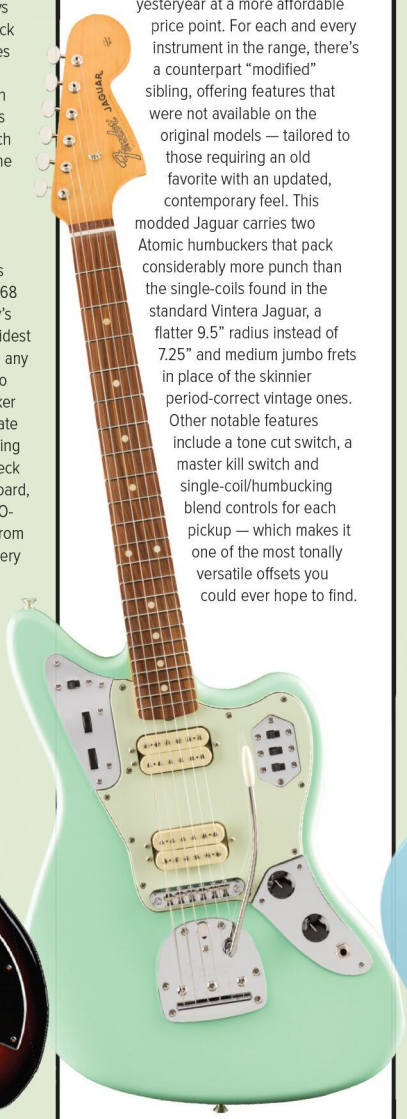


FENDER

VINTERA SERIES '60S JAGUAR MODIFIED

$2,499, fender.com

Launched in 2019, the Vintera series took over from the Mexican-made Classic line, providing the original specs and vintage colors of yesteryear at a more affordable price point. For each and every instrument in the range, there's a counterpart "modified" sibling, offering features that were not available on the original models — tailored to those requiring an old favorite with an updated, contemporary feel. This modded Jaguar carries two Atomic humbuckers that pack considerably more punch than the single-coils found in the standard Vintera Jaguar, a flatter 9.5" radius instead of 7.25" and medium jumbo frets in place of the skinnier period-correct vintage ones. Other notable features include a tone cut switch, a master kill switch and single-coil/humbucking blend controls for each pickup — which makes it one of the most tonally versatile offsets you could ever hope to find.

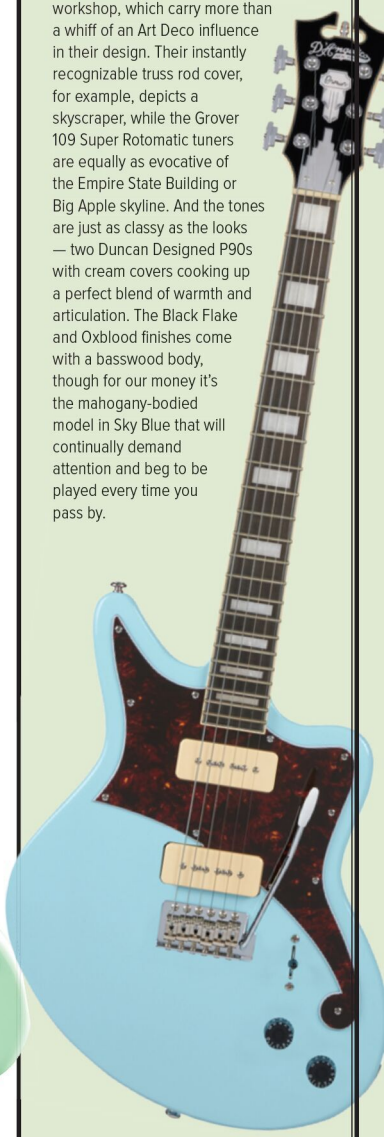


D'ANGELICO

PREMIER BEDFORD

$1,129, dangelicoguitars.com

As playable as they are affordable, the Indonesian-made D'Angelico guitars like the Premier Bedford are faithful reproductions of the high-end customs manufactured in their New York workshop, which carry more than a whiff of an Art Deco influence in their design. Their instantly recognizable truss rod cover, for example, depicts a skyscraper, while the Grover 109 Super Rotomatic tuners are equally as evocative of the Empire State Building or Big Apple skyline. And the tones are just as classy as the looks — two Duncan Designed P90s with cream covers cooking up a perfect blend of warmth and articulation. The Black Flake and Oxblood finishes come with a basswood body, though for our money it's the mahogany-bodied model in Sky Blue that will continually demand attention and beg to be played every time you pass by.



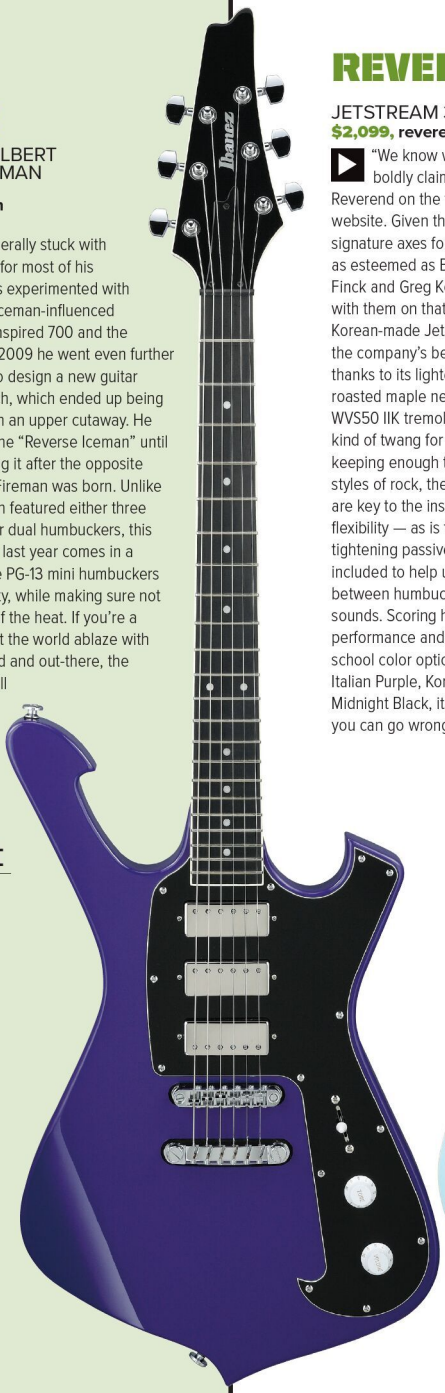
IBANEZ

FRM300 PAUL GILBERT SIGNATURE FIREMAN

$1,849, ibanez.com

Though he's generally stuck with RG-style guitars for most of his career, Paul Gilbert has experimented with other shapes like the Iceman-influenced PGM600, the Hofner-inspired 700 and the Talman-esque 900. In 2009 he went even further when given free rein to design a new guitar completely from scratch, which ended up being a reversed Iceman with an upper cutaway. He even referred to it as the "Reverse Iceman" until a fan suggested naming it after the opposite extreme... and so the Fireman was born. Unlike its predecessors, which featured either three DiMarzio single-coils or dual humbuckers, this latest incarnation from last year comes in a purple finish with three PG-13 mini humbuckers for more bite and clarity, while making sure not to sacrifice too much of the heat. If you're a shredder looking to set the world ablaze with something truly leftfield and out-there, the Fireman could very well be the weapon for you.

Paul Gilbert even referred to it as the "Reverse Iceman" until a fan suggested naming it after the opposite extreme



REVEREND

JETSTREAM 390

$2,099, reverendguitars.com

"We know what players want" boldly claim retro specialists Reverend on the front page of their website. Given that they produce signature axes for the guitar legends as esteemed as Billy Corgan, Robin Finck and Greg Koch, few would argue with them on that. The South Korean-made Jetstream 390 is one of the company's best-selling bolt-ons, thanks to its lighter korina body, roasted maple neck and Wilkinson WVS50 IIK tremolo. Packing the right kind of twang for surf while also keeping enough thickness for harder styles of rock, the trio of 9A5 soapbars are key to the instrument's tonal flexibility — as is the low-end tightening passive bass roll-off, included to help users navigate between humbucker and single-coil sounds. Scoring high in both performance and affordability, with old school color options like Chronic Blue, Italian Purple, Korina Burst and Midnight Black, it's hard to see where you can go wrong here.

FG SERIES

MAKE YOUR BREAK THROUGH
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YAMAHA
Make Waves

Fender
Fender

Words Grant Moon **Portraits** Jen Rosenstein

"I'D NEVER HEARD ANYONE DO THIS BEFORE"

Inside the strange world of **King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard**, the most eclectic and prolific rock band on Earth...

They'd made 20 albums in 10 years. Then they released three new albums – yes, three – in the last month. But there is method in this madness, as King Gizzard & The Lizard Wizard's affable vocalist, co-guitarist and head honcho Stu Mackenzie explains. "There's always a plan when we make an album," he says. "Sometimes it's still being formulated throughout the process, and sometimes it's more of a mission statement, a manifesto. Usually we'll have a couple of songs that have one vibe and some that have another, so we join the ones that have similar themes then write more songs like that. It's like we're creating brothers and sisters for them."

Since their 2012 debut *12 Bar Bruise*, this Melbourne-based collective have populated their 'Gizzverse' with their own trippy cocktail of garage-psych rock, proggy jams, thrash metal and world music. From the thrilling experiments of 2017's *Flying Microtonal Banana* to the balls-out metal of 2019's *Infest The Rats' Nest*, their catalogue shows how compelling and eclectic they are. And in 2022, they've been more prolific than ever before.

Fender
Fender

THE MAD SCIENTIST
"It's just a weird experiment," says Stu of *Changes* – the last of five albums from King Gizzard in 2022.

April saw release of their 20th LP, *Omnium Gatherum* – their first double album – which embraced alt-rock, hip-hop, space rock, metal, jazz, soul and more. And in October came three albums in quick succession: first, *Ice, Death, Planets, Lungs, Mushrooms And Lava*, then *Laminated Denim*, and finally *Changes*. This vast array of brand new material shows the serious musicality beneath their veneer of hip quirk; the band embracing modal jams, polyrhythmic intermission music and some woozy exercises in rapid key modulation. It's unbelievable when listening to it, but *Omnium Gatherum* seems to have been the most straightforward affair.

"We didn't intend to make a double," Stu says. "We just had heaps of songs. That one felt less focused than other releases, but on purpose. We didn't go in with an overarching concept and that felt nice. It was just about each song really being its own little thing, and that was liberating. We could take some different paths we usually wouldn't go down, approach ideas that felt daunting or unrealistic to do for a whole record, and just try some things out."

Things like hip-hop. The spacey, 60s-psych jazz of *Kepler 22-b* is powered by an irresistible breakbeat pulse, and *The Grim Reaper* and *Sadie Sorceress* saw the band channeling Beastie Boys-style rap smarts. Those tunes were also unconventionally written – the blueprints were based on chopped-up samples from Mackenzie's bargain-bin world music LPs, and those ideas were then expanded on by the band, completed by co-guitarists/vocalists Cook Craig and Joey Walker, Ambrose Kenny-Smith (vocals, keys, harmonica), Lucas Harwood (bass) and Michael Cavanagh (drums).

There are proggy/jazzy moments (*Evilest Man*) and catchy, retro tunes (*Blame It On The Weather*), along with some heavy stuff. Mackenzie reaches for his Gibson Holy Explorer on the Iron Maiden-esque *Gaia* – which gallops along in proggy sub-divisions of 9/8 – and the Judas Priest-like *Predator X*, one of the album's unabashed metal moments.

A leftover from last year's *Butterfly 3000* LP, the funky, eastern-flavoured *Magenta Mountain* has a beautiful riff whose lines shift from a major to minor pentatonic feel, the song opening in F# then gravitating towards its relative minor, E♭ minor. "I have grown to love pentatonics," Stu says. "There's something about it which is just so inherently melodic, and so much music is built around that scale. The trick with it is to try to make something that still feels unique, original, and fresh."

The album's relentless opener *The Dripping Tap* features some drop D, Mixolydian guitar madness set to an irresistible motorik beat (complete with wailing harmonica), and such modal experimentation forms the backbone of the first of their three new releases...

Ice, Death, Planets, Lungs, Mushrooms And Lava takes its title from the band's mnemonic for the order of the seven modes of the major scale: Ionian, Dorian, Phrygian, Lydian, Mixolydian, Aeolian and Locrian. Convening at Gizz HQ – their large rehearsal space on the outskirts of Melbourne – they would spend one day jamming on each individual mode, then go back through the five or six hours of music recorded, and sift it for the most interesting moments, then arrange. "The concept there was to not prepare anything," Stu says, "to just roll tape and capture everything. We record the main tracks, a day per song, but there's a lot of content in there. We went back through all the recordings, which took an absurd amount of time, energy and patience, and grabbed all the parts that had a vibe, that didn't sound like anything we'd ever done before."

With sax and organ, the gentle, almost Caribbean *Mycelium* is their Ionian moment, an easy vamp on the E♭ and F minor – the mode's first two chords in E♭. But perhaps typically for such an unorthodox group, the major scale wasn't King Gizzard's starting point. "We attacked the modes in the order we felt comfy with them," Stu explains. "We started with [the funky single] *Ice V*, which uses the Dorian mode, then went Mixolydian [the catchy 13-minuter *Hell's Itch*], Phrygian [the jazzy *Magma*], the straight minor [or Aeolian, on the wah wah-packed, flute-flecked *Iron Lung*], then Ionian for *Mycelium*."

Which leaves many guitarist's favourite mode, the Lydian, and the frequently neglected Locrian, whose ♭2, ♭3, ♭5, ♭6 and ♭7 offer little in the way of conventional, consonant tonality. "Locrian was easily the hardest," Stu says. "We were nervous about it so left it last! It's easy to play Locrian and sound dissonant, but I wanted us to sound deliberate and melodic, but maintain the loose, freewheeling feeling of the jam it came from. We'd done all these other jams beforehand, so once we got into a groove and a pattern, that one, which we called *Gliese 710*, kind of clicked."

The Lydian piece, *Lava*, comes with flute, sax, and wah'd guitar, giving that brightest of all modes a woozy, hypnotic, psychedelic feel. "That was hard for us," he says. "We tend to sit on the tonic – the I – and explore it, but Lydian has that sharp four, which means it's inherently floating outside of its tonic – it doesn't *want* you to sit on the I. A lot of our music is muscular and strong and powerful, and Lydian is none of those things. It's like a cloud, like air – unsolid. Funnily enough the straight-up major scale/Ionian was quite challenging as well. It was about finding something that didn't feel too happy, too 'Disney'."

With a piano, drumkit and an assortment of spanking new and knackered old synths also in the room, King Gizzard's three guitarists would share their instruments – Mackenzie's

"I'D BE LOOKING AT MY GUITAR NECK AND BE LIKE, 'FK, WHAT SCALE AM I IN?!'"**
STU MACKENZIE

Photo: Tim Fenby

trademark 1967 Yamaha Flying Samurai, Walker's Gibson SG, Craig's Fender Jazzmaster. Mackenzie went through his sole amp, a Fender Hot Rod Deluxe, using its dirty channel, and his go-to fuzz, an old Devi Ever Torn's Peaker.

The following album, *Laminated Denim*, was made as an intermediate step between *Omnium Gatherum* and *Ice, Death*'s modal explorations. In 2020 the band were meant to play at the iconic Red Rocks Amphitheatre in Colorado. Two, 15-minute intermissions were built into their mammoth, three-hour performance, so they had produced two pieces of music to play during those breaks as a clock ticked down – at its natural 60BPM – on the stage's screen. Due to the pandemic, the Red Rocks show was pushed back to this October, and, veing who they are, the band couldn't resist making two brand new tracks for the same purpose. *The Land Before Timeland* and *Hypertension* are motorik, guitar-heavy frenzies, and masterclasses in how powerful repetition in musical can be.

"We actually started *Laminated Denim* before *Ice, Death*," Stu says, "but they were recorded in a similar fashion. It was entirely improvised. We had a click track in our ears because there'll be a clock ticking down on the screen, and both songs are a polyrhythm to that – I think one might be 150 and 180 – they work with the 60BPM, so the clock becomes a polyrhythm to the tempo of the tracks. Guitar-wise, we stripped things back a lot – I'm playing the Yamaha with my Cry Baby Wah and a fuzz. Cook's on his Jazzmaster, Joe's on his SG."

The Red Rocks show is part of the second US leg of the band's extensive world tour this year. Live, Mackenzie keeps just three guitars on stage – his Flying Samurai, which he keeps in standard or drop-D tuning, his custom Gibson Holy Explorer, tuned to C# standard [C#, F#, B, E, G#, C# – great for metal], and his Flying Banana guitar for the microtonal songs. Attached to his guitar by his Divine Noise Curly Cable, his live pedalboard's pretty sparse – the Torn's Peaker fuzz, Cry Baby, JHS Superbolt overdrive, Boss DD3 Distortion and a Boss TU3 tuner. Craig has two Jazzmasters, one in standard, one in C# standard, while Craig's SG shares a stand with a Flying V, and his own microtonal guitar.

But the guitar is only one strand in King Gizzard's musical fabric. Their final 2022 album, *Changes*, came about from Mackenzie's noodlings on the piano, which leads him to very useful tip for budding composers: "I'm a big believer in writing on an instrument you don't feel very comfortable on. I love guitar – it's far and away the instrument I feel the most comfy on and I'll always play it. But unless you try very hard not to, you can get stuck in certain ruts, of playing the same thing, of using the same patterns. There's nothing wrong with that, as long as you're aware of it, but that's why I love composing on a piano. The separation of lines between your left and right hands means you can sketch out parts for three people – one playing chords, one playing bass, then one playing a melody. Then you can give this a rough idea to three players who can flesh the parts out."

All seven tracks on *Changes* are predicated on an idea Mackenzie came up with, on piano, of modulating quickly between the keys of D

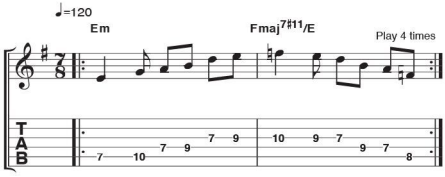
"A LOT OF OUR MUSIC IS MUSCULAR AND STRONG AND POWERFUL"
STU MACKENZIE

major and F# major, and exploring the fresh, surprising tonal possibilities this unusual marriage of keys brings. From the cycling A/B chords of the playful title track to the spacey *Astroturf*, from the bluesy *No Body* (some great, spare lead playing here) to the motorik *Gondii*, the band make this pleasingly muso exercise a highly listenable one.

"Those two scales are so different," he says. "They contain very few of the same notes. I wanted to make it sound pretty, beautiful, and not too melodically *weird*. I'd just never heard anyone do this before. I'm sure there are jazz records like this, but this doesn't feel like jazz. The challenge was to make it *not* sound like jazz to the listener. It's just a weird experiment, a study. When we first had the idea back in 2017 we tried to make a record out of it, but couldn't. Everything we did was unlistenable! I'd be looking at my guitar neck and be like, 'F*ck, what scale am I in?!' But there was something catchy about it, and every time I'd sit in front of any keyboard I would oscillate between those two scales, and every now and then land on something pretty. It took five years of tinkering in the background, but slowly it came together. My favourite records that we've made as a band have always been ones I felt we couldn't have made a few years ago. They feel like progressions or signposts along the road."

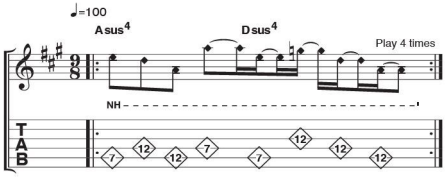
And even over these past five years, King Gizzard have come far. It's how they've been able to come up with four compelling, extraordinary albums on the bounce this year. Stu reckons they've developed as players together, and – crucially – they're listening to what each other are doing better than ever before. "We jam for a little bit," he says, "so you're conversing in a certain way, musically. And if you're talking all day, by the end you've said some fairly interesting things..."

KING GIZZARD-STYLE ODD TIME



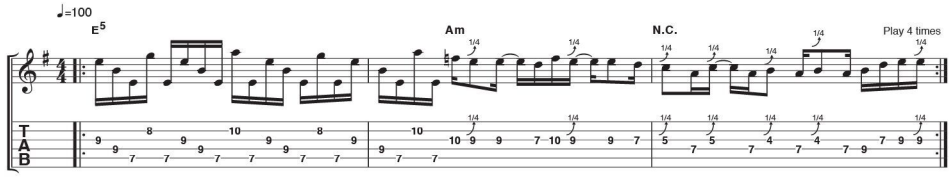
This riff is in the E minor pentatonic scale with an added b9 interval (E F G A B D). 7/8 time is one eighth-note shorter than regular 4/4 time which gives the riff a proggy flavour. Listen to the drums and bass on the backing track and follow the accents to match the guitar riff.

9/8 TIME HARMONICS RIFF



This part is in 9/8 time, which is just one eighth-note longer than regular 4/4. Use your first and fourth fingers to reach from the 7th to 12th frets and lightly touch each string above the fret-wire and release and pluck simultaneously to play each note as a natural harmonic.

MICROTONAL IDEA



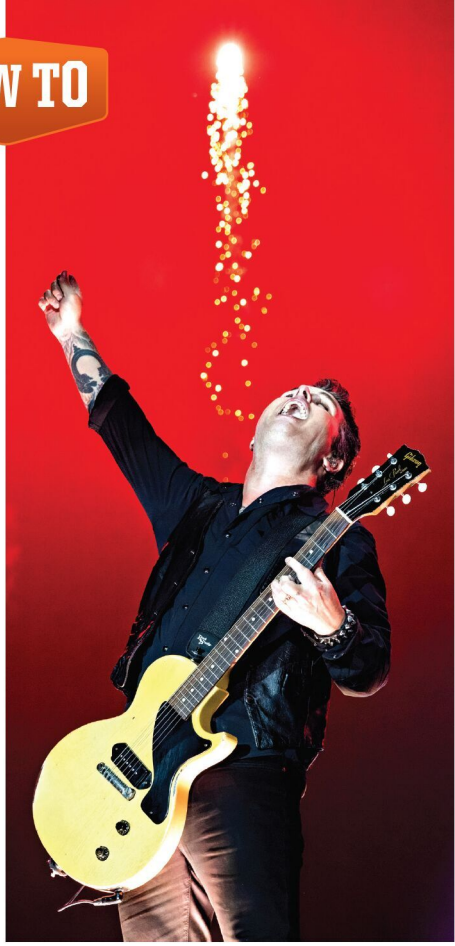
King Gizz sometimes play microtonal guitars, which have notes in-between the ones found on regular guitars. We can mimic the microtonal sound by bending quarter-tones; these are in-between a fretting note and a semitone bend. To create the microtonal notes use your first finger to very slightly pull down on the third string.

HOW TO

FIVE WAYS TO...

MAKE YOUR POWER CHORDS ROCK!

From AC/DC to Zakk Wylde, it's the subtle details that let you riff harder

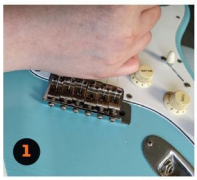


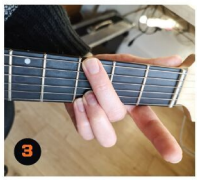
The humble two-note power chord is so effective that you can listen to entire albums of rock, metal, and punk without hearing another kind of chord. Even bands that wouldn't tour together in a million years – Nirvana and Guns N' Roses, Napalm Death and McBusted – are united by the awesome *kerrang* of the power chord.

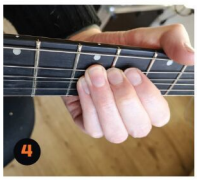
Traditional chords are major and minor triads (meaning they have three notes). The middle note is called the 'third' (because it comes from the third note of the relevant scale) and gives the chord its major or minor character. Power chords leave the third out, which means they almost always sound right whatever other harmony is going on. Triads can sound pretty dodgy with distortion, as all the extra harmonic overtones generated start to clash with each other. Simpler power chords sound great with gain, making them the go-to shapes for guitars needing crunch.

As long as your guitar is in tune and you're not accidentally bending a string sharp, it's hard to go wrong with power chords, but some players make them sound extra awesome. The first thing to try is just hitting one power chord through a dirty amp and listening to the sustain. Stadium bands like Kiss often let their chords sustain and it can sound much bigger than strumming constantly.

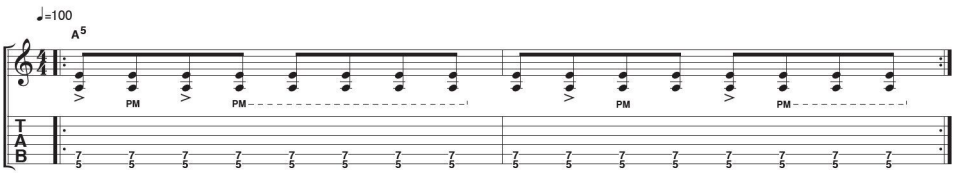
Once you can make that sound good, check out some other pro secrets. James Hetfield and Billie Joe Armstrong both use rapid downstrokes and switch rapidly between palm muting and accented, unmuted chords, although they get quite different results. AC/DC, and all who follow them, use open power chord shapes that sound amazing ringing out through a loud amp. 80s metal players take things up a notch by adding vibrato and harmonics for more extreme effects.





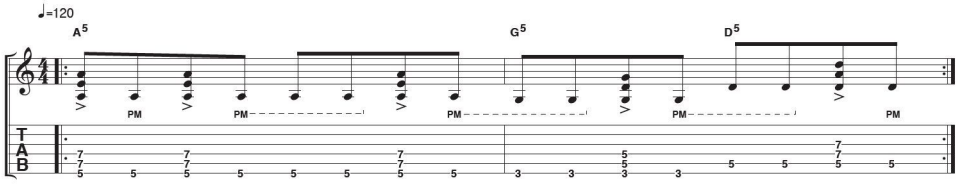


EXAMPLE 1 USE ACCENTS!



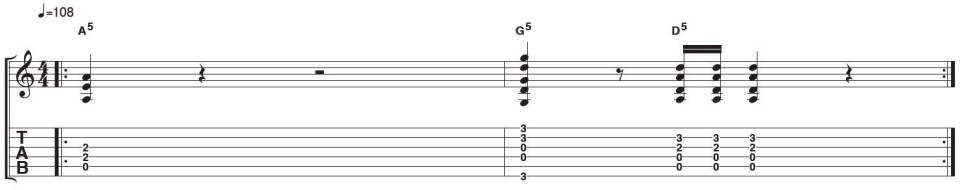
Throwing in occasional unmuted stabs can make a palm muted chug much more effective. Find a picking hand position where you can quickly drop the heel of your hand down by the bridge for the muted notes.

EXAMPLE 2 THREE NOTES ARE BETTER THAN TWO!



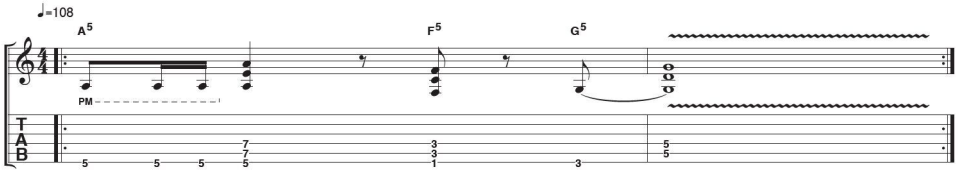
Green Day's Billie Joe knows the two-note power chord is great, and the three-note one is 50% better! This just adds the root note an octave higher, but as you'll see later it opens up some cool possibilities.

EXAMPLE 3 TRY OPEN SHAPES!



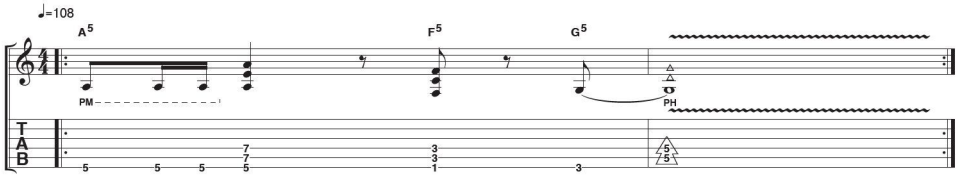
For AC/DC-style open chords, wrap your thumb over the neck to choke the low E string when you're not playing it. For the G5, your second finger should naturally mute the A string as you fret the low E.

EXAMPLE 4 ADD VIBRATO!

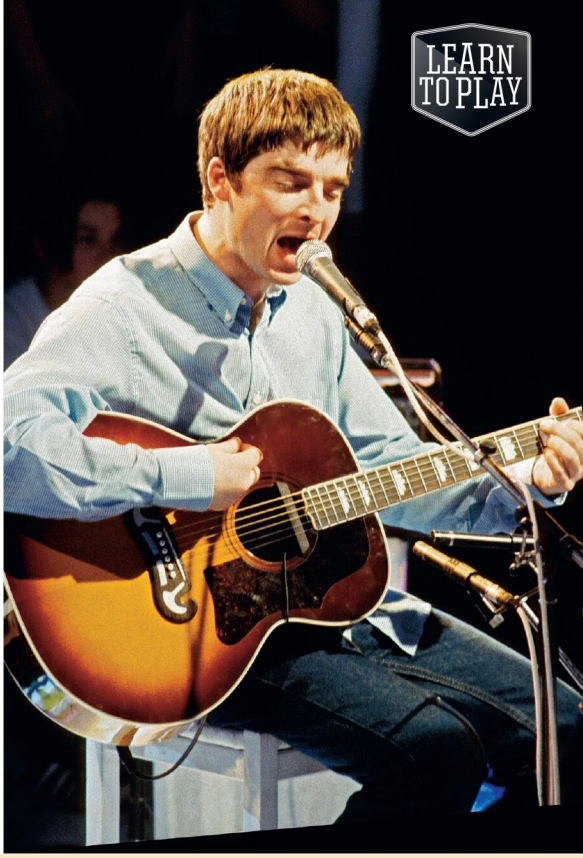


Dio's Vivian Campbell used vibrato chords to hide his Les Paul's dodgy intonation, and it's become a metal trademark. Pull the strings down gently and make sure you release them fully back to neutral so the chord sounds in tune.

EXAMPLE 5 ADD PINCHED HARMONICS!



Zakk Wylde takes things a step further with pinched harmonics. Angle your pick towards the floor and brush the strings with the side of your thumb as you strum through to create the harmonics, then add vibrato for the full effect.



OPEN-MIC SONGBOOK

OASIS
HALF THE WORLD AWAY

Try out Noel Gallagher's cool arpeggios and Bonehead's strummed acoustic chords as AG looks at one of the band's best loved songs

Half The World Away was originally released as a B-side to the single *Whatever* in 1994, but became perhaps Oasis' best-known non-album track when it was used as the theme music to the long-running BBC sitcom, *The Royle Family*. The recording is a stripped down affair with Noel Gallagher providing the vocals, guitar and drums, and Paul 'Bonehead' Arthurs playing acoustic guitar and keyboards. As the chord progression and top-line melody are so strong, the song is ideally suited to a solo acoustic

CHORDS

Most of the chords are typical open shapes you may have seen before, but there are some trickier shapes such as Fmaj7, which has the thumb over the top of the neck to fret the root note; if this is uncomfortable simply leave the low F note out. For the slash chords (C/B, G/B and G7/F) use the underside of your first or second fingers to touch and mute the idle strings and prevent them from ringing out when strumming.

HALF THE WORLD AWAY
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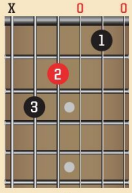

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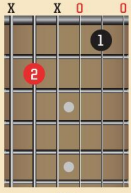
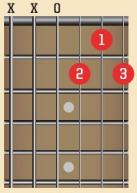
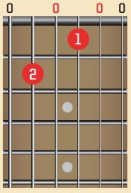


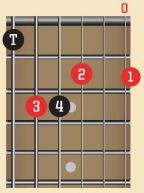
C/B



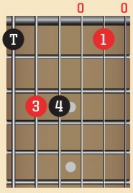
D7



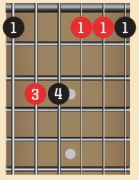
E7



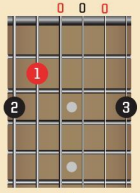
Fmaj7



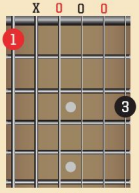
Fmaj7sus2



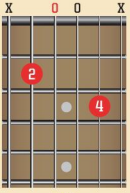
Fm



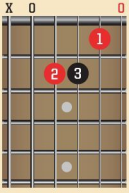
G



G7/F



G/B



Am

Guitars and backing Charlie Griffiths. Photo Getty

SONGSHEET

HALF THE WORLD AWAY

Intro / Instrumental

C / / / Fmaj7 / / / C / / / Fmaj7 / / /

Verse 1

C Fmaj7
I would like to leave this city
C Fmaj7
This old town don't smell too pretty
and
C G/B Am
I can feel the warning signs
D7 Fmaj7
Running around my mind
C Fmaj7
And when I leave this island
C Fmaj7
I'll book myself into a soul asylum
C G/B Am
'Cause I can feel the warning signs
D7 Fmaj7
Running around my mind

Pre-chorus

Am C E7
So here I go, I'm still scratching
Am
around in the same old hole
Fmaj7 D7
My body feels young but my mind is
G G7/F
very old
Am C E7
So what do you say you can't give me
Am
the dreams that are mine anyway

Chorus

Fmaj7 Fm
Half the world away, half the world
away
C G/B Am
Half the world away
D7
I've been lost I've been found
Fmaj7
But I don't feel down

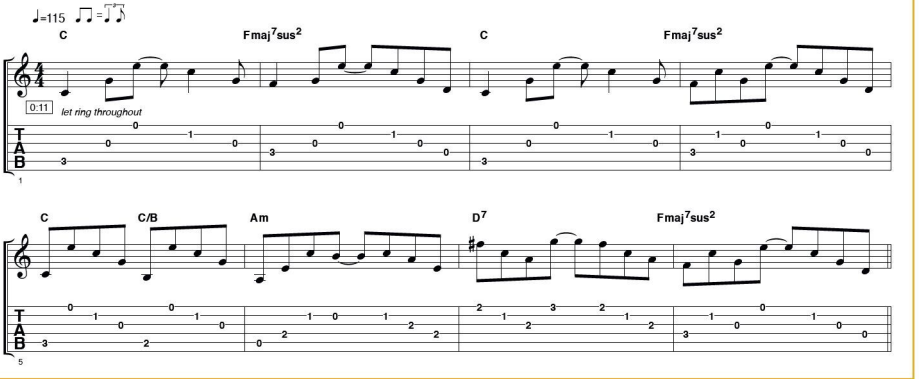
Break

Fmaj7 / / / / / (clap-clap)

Verse 2

C Fmaj7
And when I leave this planet
C Fmaj7
You know I'd stay but I just can't
stand it and
C G/B Am
I can feel the warning signs
D7 Fmaj7
Running around my mind
C Fmaj7
And if I can leave this spirit
C Fmaj7
I'll find me a hole and I'll live in it and
C G/B Am
I can feel the warning signs
D7 Fmaj7
Running around my mind

OASIS HALF THE WORLD AWAY *Intro & verse*



You can play through the song in a simple strumming style, or you could combine your strums with the picked electric guitar part tabbed here. For example, start by strumming the full chord on beat 1, then use your pick to articulate the individual strings. Feel free to be creative and see what works best for you.

CLASSIC TRACK

IRON MAIDEN

RUN TO THE HILLS

Gallop your way to guitar stardom with the mighty Maiden's classic slice of 80s British heavy metal

Photo Getty Guitarsandbacking Steve Ellsworth

This legendary track appeared on Maiden's 1982 metal classic *The Number Of The Beast*, and features Dave Murray on lead duties with Adrian Smith holding down the rhythm guitar on 'root-5th' powerchords. The song kicks off with a run of tricky string bends which need to be pitched as accurately as possible. Aim to hit the target notes quickly, without drawing out the bends.

The verse features Maiden's trademark 'gallop' riffing – a repeating rhythm played mostly on two-string powerchords. Play a constant down-down-up picking pattern, keeping your motion as minimal as you can.

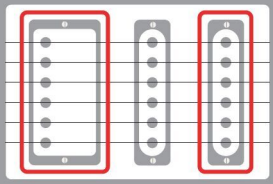
Murray's solo features fast legato licks, but it's nearly all based in the good old minor pentatonic scale, so hopefully the phrasing will feel familiar.

SOUND ADVICE

Everything you need to know before playing 'Run To The Hills'

GET THE TONE

CHANNEL DISTORTION

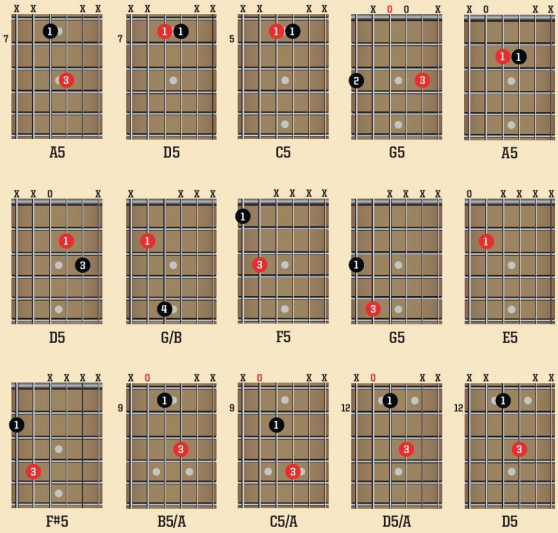


Select a bridge position humbucker for the rhythm parts, then switch to a neck single coil when you reach the solo.

A British Marshall-type distorted amp tone works best for *RTTH*. Be generous with the midrange on your amp to help cut through during the solo. Though single coil pickups were used on the recording, Dave Murray uses a humbucker-loaded Strat these days – and if you're trying to get close to the sound of Maiden's triple-axe attack, the two-coil approach is probably the better option for those galloping rhythm parts. An HSS configuration is ideal so that you can switch over to the creamier neck single coil pickup for the solo.

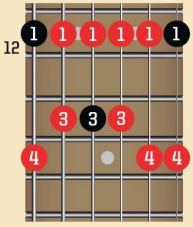
CHORDS

The majority of the track uses simple powerchords, so it's just a question of authority and delivery when tackling these two-string shapes. You're probably familiar with the similar three-string powerchords. However, you'll get a tighter, more focussed sound during the gallop riffs using the smaller shapes.

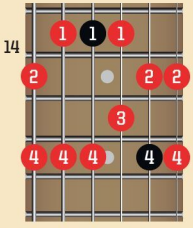


SCALES

The E minor pentatonic scale in 12th position should be familiar to everyone, so make sure you know this scale. The majority of the solo sticks to legato phrases based in this single pattern. It briefly wanders into shape two, where you'll see the large three-semitone bend at the 17th fret.



E minor pentatonic scale (shape 1)



E minor pentatonic scale (shape 2)

CLASSIC TRACK

IRON MAIDEN
RUN TO THE HILLS

FULL TAB

RUN TO THE HILLS
Words and Music by Steve Harris
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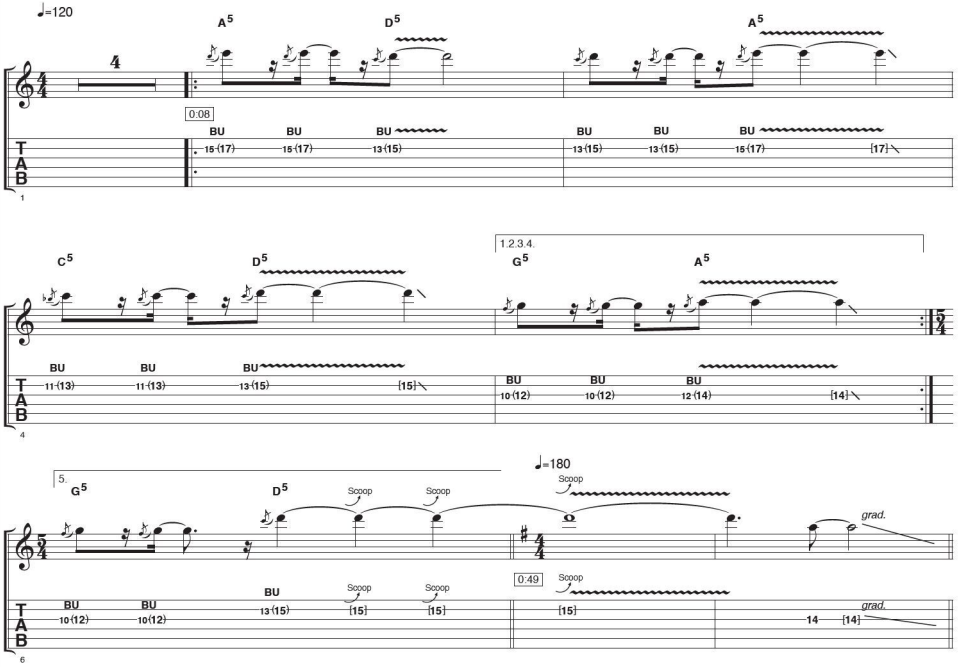
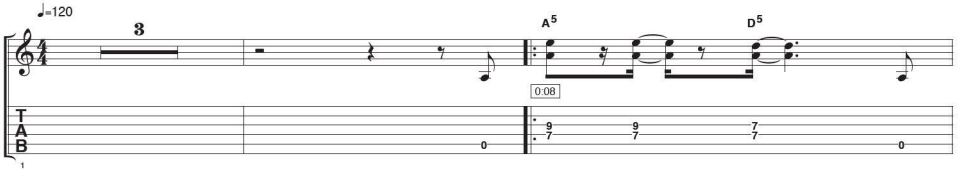
IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Intro (lead guitar)

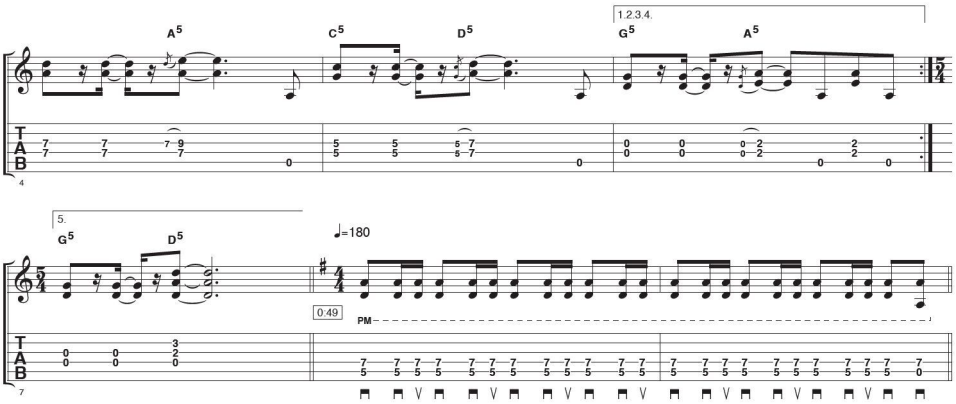


Accurate bending is the main challenge here, so spend lots of time perfecting your tuning on each tone bend. Remember, the physical distances you bend will vary depending on which string you're on, so try not to overcook these phrases, particularly when you reach the third string.

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Intro (rhythm guitar)

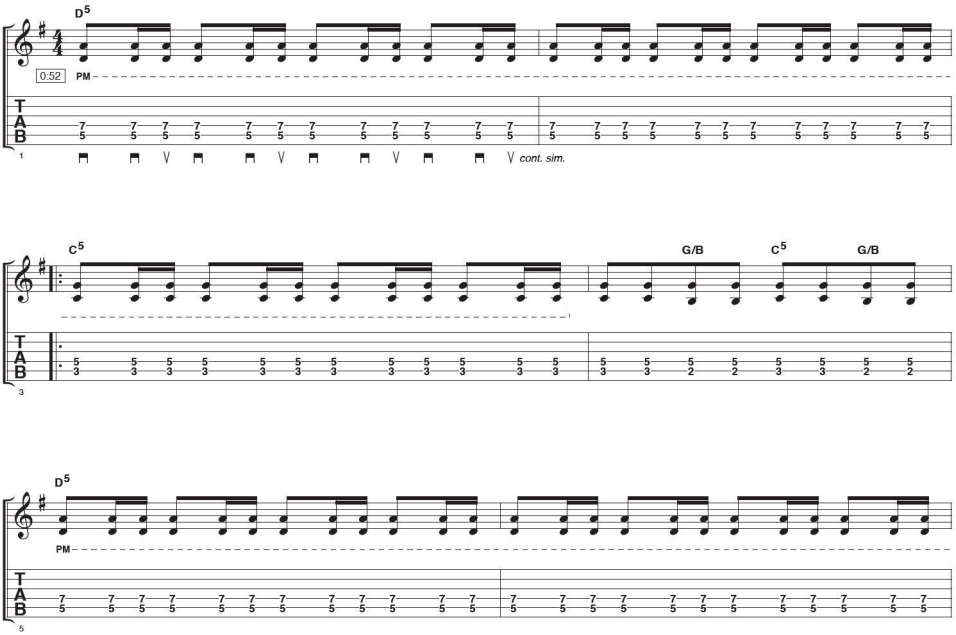


IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Intro (rhythm guitar, cont'd)



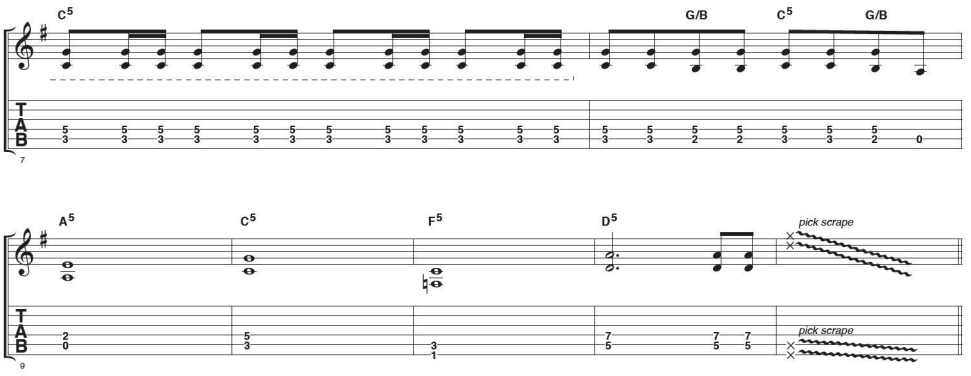
Pay attention to the brief rests between each chord in bars 3 to 7. The momentary pause gives you time to comfortably change shape/position. Notice that the second chord in bar 3 falls on the fourth 16th note of the beat, and not on the beat. This takes careful timing, so practise slowly to begin with.

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Verse



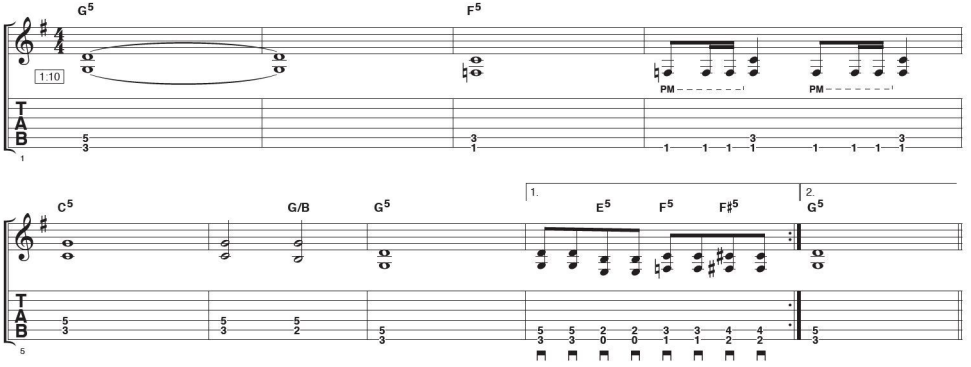
CLASSIC TRACK

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Verse (cont'd)



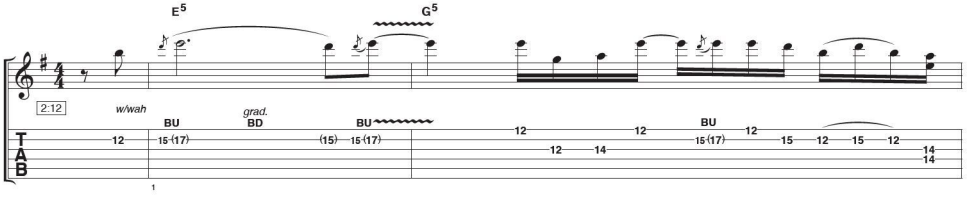
This is the classic Maiden 'gallop' rhythm. The addition of palm muting makes things a tad more difficult, so spend time with a metronome building up your speed. Stamina can be difficult at this tempo, too. If you find yourself getting sloppy or you feel any cramp, take a short rest, stretch, then begin again.

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Chorus

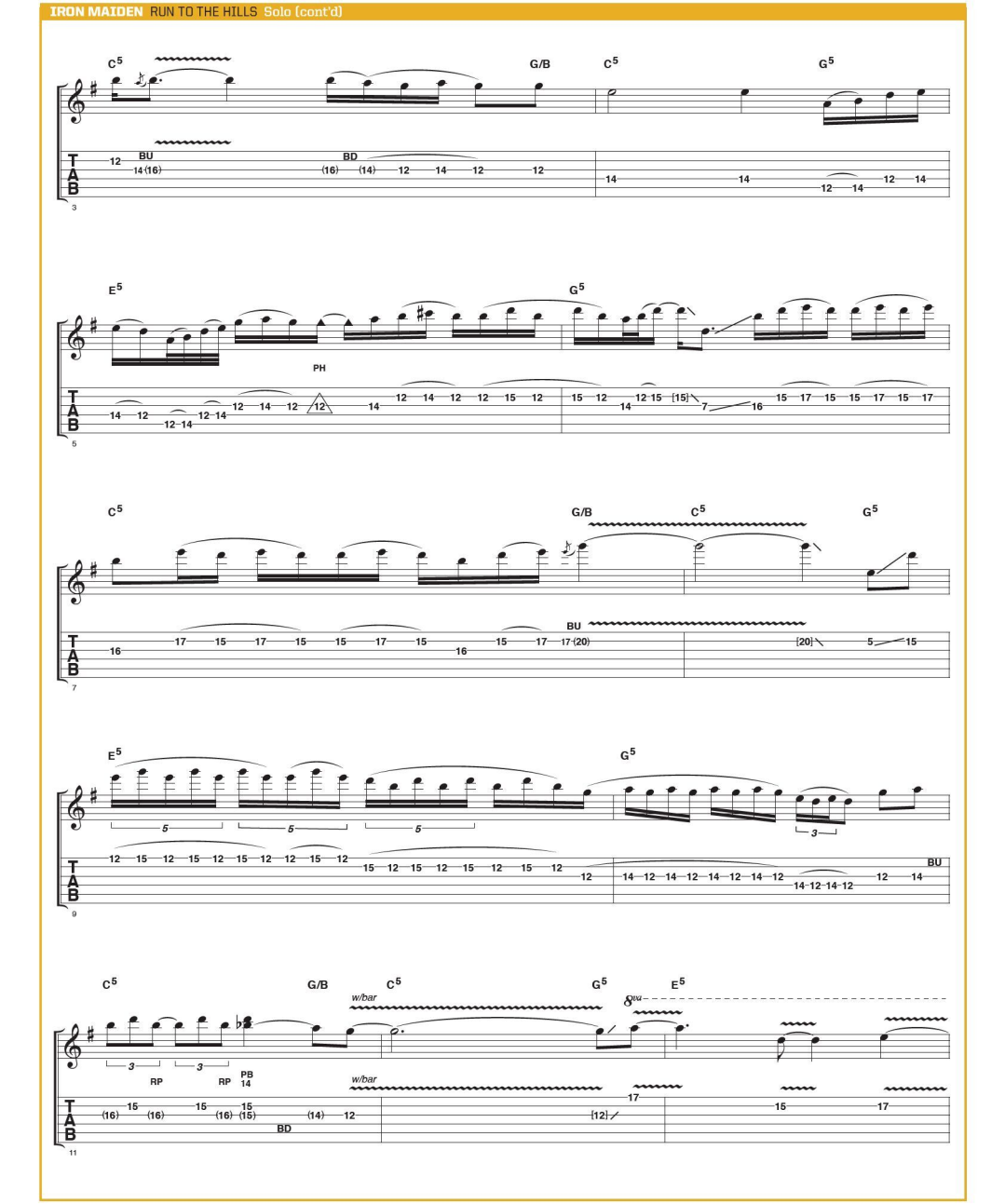


The long, ringing powerchords are easy to play. However, you'll need to make sure you catch the iconic gallop rhythm in bar 4, so take care with your timing. We recommend that you play bar 8 using all downstrokes, but it also works with alternate picking, if you prefer.

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Solo

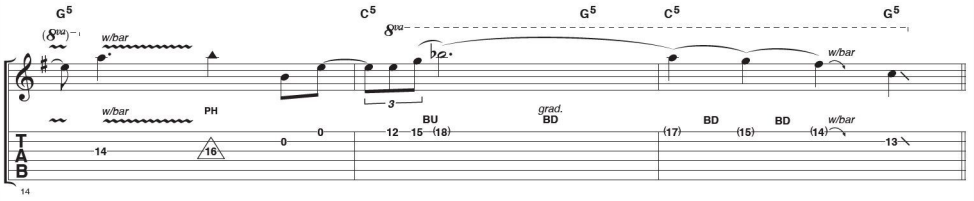


IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Solo (cont'd)



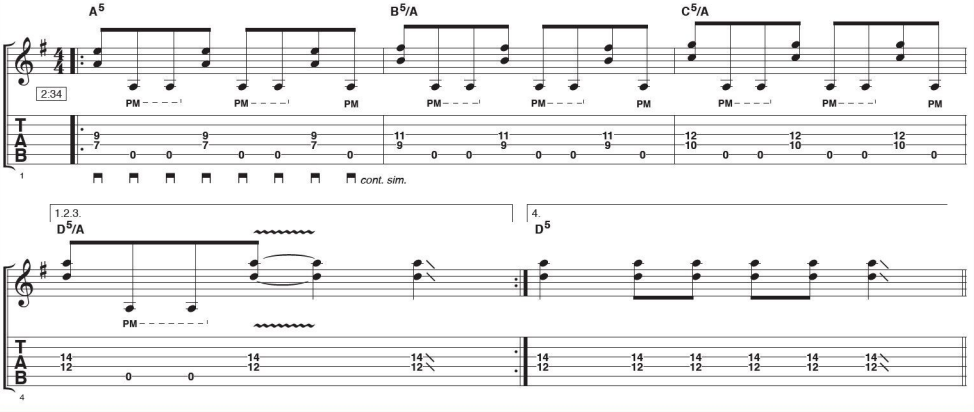
CLASSIC TRACK

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Solo (cont'd)



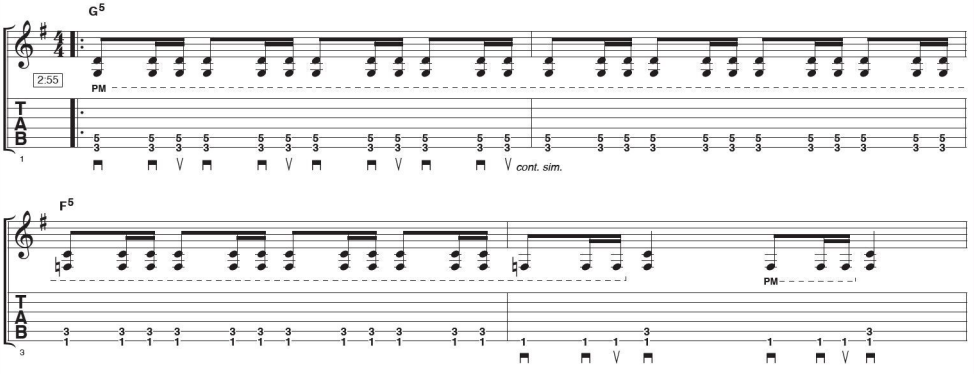
Don't stick to a strict fret-hand 'one finger per fret' rule here. There are many legato lines, and the fourth finger isn't always strong enough to cope. Most of the hammer-on and pull-off phrases are therefore played with the first, second and third fingers. There's a 'looseness' to the legato licks which will come once you've memorised the solo.

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Bridge

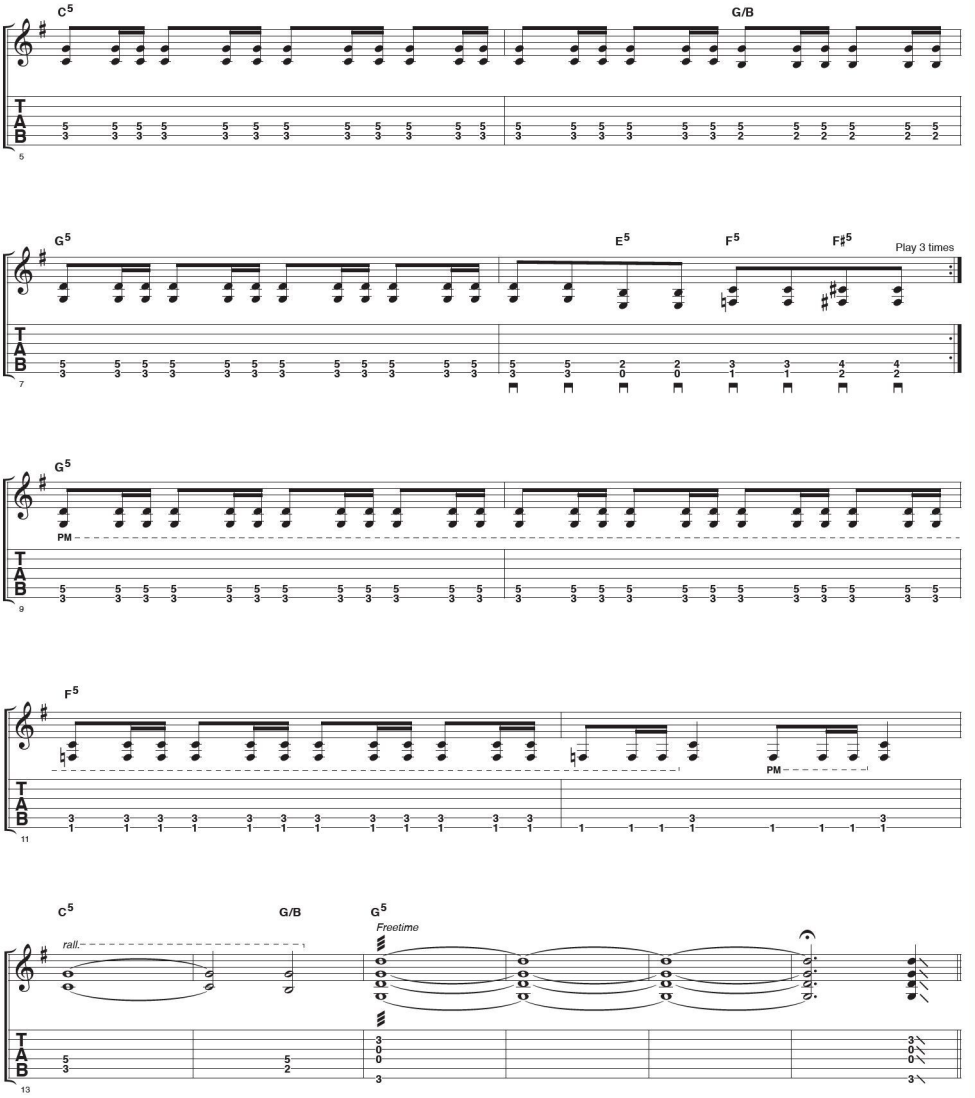


This entire section needs to be played with downstrokes for the correct feel and sound. Don't be tempted to play with alternate picking, because the chords in between the palm mutes will occur on odd strokes and risk sounding uneven. This is a great riff for honing your palm-muting technique.

IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Outro chorus



IRON MAIDEN RUN TO THE HILLS Outro chorus (cont'd)



The short drum fill helps to point to the final few chords, starting with C5 in bar 13. The G5 chords starting in bar 15 are tremolo picked, but don't have to be played as fast as possible – just keep the stream of chords constant. Listen out for the last cymbal crash as a cue for the final G chord.

HOT GEAR

STERLING BY MUSIC MAN JARED DINES ARTIST SERIES SINGRAY

RRP: $2,250 • cmcmusic.com.au

The Sterling by Music Man Jared Dines Artist Series StingRay guitar is engineered to specifically meet the demands of the multi-talented guitarist's technique. The Dines StingRay is the only StingRay model with 24 frets and hot-rodded dual humbucking pickups. The guitar features a mahogany body, hard maple neck with a vintage-style tremolo bridge, and gold hardware — plus, the Dines is uniquely designed with a kill switch and a tone/volume dual control. Available in Black.

MARKBASS MB58R 102 PURE

RRP: $1,795 • cmcmusic.com.au

The MB58R series is a further example of how Markbass is always one step ahead in innovating using state-of-the-art technologies. The MB58R 102 PURE features 2x10 inch Markbass Neodymium custom speakers and a new hi-fi tweeter that is very focused in the high range with an excellent transient response. It weighs just 10.5 kg, handles 400W of power and delivers a loud, clear and punchy sound that will cut through any mix. Now made in Italy, the MB58R series cabinets' custom components guarantee Markbass' unmistakable tone every time you plug in.

FENDER AMERICAN VINTAGE II 1977 TELECASTER CUSTOM

RRP: starting from $4,099 • fender.com

The Fender American Vintage II series presents a remarkably accurate take on the revolutionary designs that altered the course of musical history. Built with period-accurate bodies, necks and hardware, premium finishes and meticulously voiced, year-specific pickups, each instrument captures the essence of authentic Fender craftsmanship and tone. The Telecaster Custom marked one of Fender's earliest forays into the use of humbucking pickups. The Tele Custom featured a 3-way toggle located on the upper bout and dual volume and tone controls mounted to a stylish, elongated pickguard. The American Vintage II 1977 Telecaster Custom reproduces the quintessential tone and feel of the original.

JACKSON PRO SERIES SIGNATURE JOSH SMITH SOLOIST™ SL7 ET

RRP: $4,699 • fender.com

This 7-string collaboration with Northlane guitarist Josh Smith begins with a 27 inch scale length, essential for providing a wider sonic palette and handling the extreme low tunings Smith depends upon. The Soloist alder body is sleekly sculpted for ergonomic comfort, and has been paired with a graphite-reinforced through-body caramelized maple neck for enhanced stability and sustain. Designed to deliver effortless playability, the 12 – 16 inch compound radius ebony fingerboard with 24 jumbo frets has a more pronounced curvature across its width near the nut for comfortable chording, and gradually flattens to a very slight curvature toward the upper frets for blazing fast solos and comfortable bends.

LINE 6 DL4 MKII DELAY MODELER

RRP: $809.99 • au.yamaha.com

The DL4 MkII includes everything in the original DL4 Delay Modeler, while introducing 15 new MkII delays drawn from Line 6's HX family of amp and effects processors and both 4-Switch and 1-Switch loopers with up to 240 seconds of record time (expandable to several hours using an optional microSD card). There's also an XLR microphone input, MIDI In and Out/Thru connectors, heavy duty footswitches, three bypass options, and a jack for connecting an optional expression pedal or two additional footswitches. The DL4 MkII is also smaller and lighter than the original, making it an even more appealing choice for modern musicians.

ACE VINTAGE REISSUE STRAPS BY D'ANDREA

RRP: $72.99 • egm.com.au

During the Rock-and-Roll glory days of the '60's and '70s, Ace Guitar Straps were worn by many iconic guitarists of the time. The design team at D'Andrea USA has gone to great lengths to replicate the Ace Strap designs seen in many historical photographs of the period. "Let Your Freak Flag Fly" and hang your favorite guitar around your shoulder with an Ace Vintage Reissue Strap by D'Andrea USA. This vintage line of straps is based on the legends that wore them back in the 60's and 70's, each strap is 2.0" wide, equipped with leather ends and a comfortable stitched vinyl layer on the inside of the strap. Unlike many straps made today, these straps feature a metal adjustment buckle. These straps truly bring back the classic vibe!

YAMAHA FG RED LABEL 3 SERIES

RRP: $2,199 • au.yamaha.com

The FG heritage extends back to the 1966 release of the FG180, Yamaha's first production acoustic guitar. In the more than half-century since, the company has balanced traditional guitar craft with a spirit of constant refinement, pursuing its vision of the ideal Yamaha folk guitar. Inspired by Yamaha's iconic "red label" guitars of the 1960s, FG Red Label guitars feature a semi-gloss finish and high-quality components to deliver a beautiful vintage aesthetic. Custom-treated Sitka spruce top paired with mahogany back and sides deliver genuine aged-wood tone and sustain, while a new scalloped bracing pattern offers a louder, more balanced tone.

ZOOM G2 FOUR AND G2X FOUR

RRP: $399 / $479 • dynamicmusic.com.au

The ZOOM G2 Four and G2X Four give guitarists more tone variations than ever before thanks to all-new amp modeling and innovative IR technology. They combine faithfully reproduced models of classic amps and pair them with cabinet models that utilize ZOOM's new Multi-layer IR technology. This gives guitarists both great tone and the feeling of that "big stage" sound in any environment. Each amp model is built with Zoom's innovative Multi-Layer IR's, to recreate the tonal characteristics and feel of playing through classic amps and cabinets. These Impulse Responses were captured from iconic cabinets at 3 different volumes and are blended and activated based on the volume of your guitar.

SETH BACCUS SHORELINE JM-H90

RRP: $6,795 • www.guitarfactory.net

The Shoreline JM is the newest model in the Seth Baccus range and delivers clear bell like tones with just the right amount of punch and growl when the amp is cranked. The Shoreline range also includes many modern features to bring it up to date with the 21st century. The easy access neck join and hand carved heel design allows the player to get right to the top frets very comfortably. The modern 12 inch fingerboard radius and medium jumbo frets make for easy playability and clean string bending. The choice of pickup options deliver a vintage voice but with the guts to get crunchy.

LEHLE MONO VOLUME S

RRP: $599 • egm.net.au

With the Lehle Mono Volume S you get an active and wear-free volume pedal, which is lighter and smaller but not less efficient: Equipped with the proven and evolving magnet sensor VCA technology of the other Lehle Volume pedals, you control the volume of your instrument precisely. As it has no mechanical potentiometer, the typical noise, endlessly expensive repairs and complicated adjustment can be avoided. Your foot is just moving the magnet, while the Hall-sensor measures the distance, with great precision and very fast. An ARM Cortex CPU processes the data of the sensor in a matching, musical taper and controls the VCA. Here, the signal path is always kept completely analogue – and in your hands.

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hi-fi

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LESSON

IN THE MIX: GETTING GUITARS TO SOUND RIGHT | PART TWO

Electro-Voice

EVERSE 8

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REAL PRO-AUDIO PERFORMANCE

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UP TO
12 HRS
OF RUN TIME[1]

BATTERY-POWERED CONVENIENCE

EVERSE 8 is powered by a custom-designed high-capacity Li-ion battery pack, fully optimized for audio use and providing plentiful power for up to 12 hours of run time. Protection circuitry reduces the risk of your battery discharging to such a low voltage that it can no longer be recharged – for example, after long periods in storage. Tool-free screws make removing the battery pack effortless. Uncompromising sound quality, unplugged.

IP43-RATED WEATHERIZED DESIGN[2]

In combination with the rugged polypropylene enclosure, use of the included weatherized input cover allows EVERSE 8 to meet the IP43 rating (water resistant for splashes and light rain) when running on battery power and while Bluetooth® streaming. Built-in feet with no-skid rubber pads ensure the system stays put. Bring EVERSE 8 outside for busking, marching band practice, or the backyard BBQ – wherever you need a PA, whatever the forecast.

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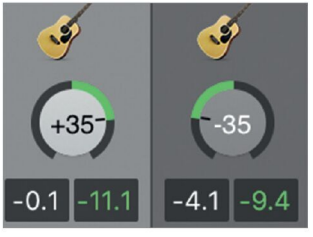
NINE SIMPLE STEPS FOR MIXING GUITAR

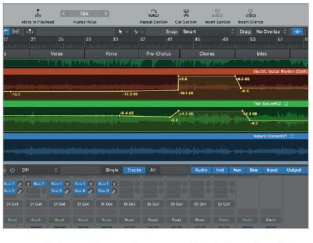
You've got the tone right, but what about levels? Part two of a two part series.



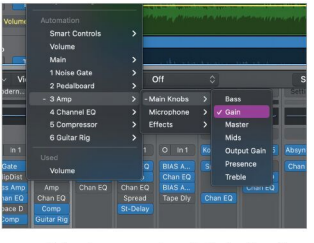
1 To further augment the sound of your guitar, adding a second take of yourself playing the same part, then panning both parts to the opposite positions in the stereo image can accentuate the impact of each chord. Try different chord voicings, rather than keeping things exactly the same.

2 To define these panned parts even further, sculpt the EQ slightly differently for each part. Clipping or boosting certain frequencies then doing the reverse for the other part makes for a more dynamically interesting sound-stage, and makes each guitar sit better in its place.

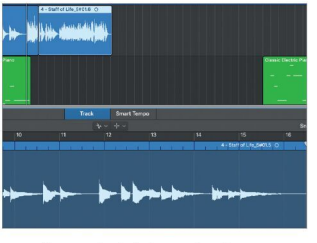
3 If you've built up quite a few different guitar parts, you might want to bus them together, and apply a master effect — such as reverb — to all of them. This can help the parts feel like they're in the same room, and help them stick. It can also save your CPU from loading different instances of the same effect.



4 Automation can be a massive help when it comes to guitar mixing, as you might want to automatically apply different attributes at key moments of the song. If you're after a big chorus, then automating an increase in volume can bring everything to the forefront, before settling down again for the verse, without you worrying about it.



5 Major changes can be quite jarring if you're not careful, so take care to subtly apply the automation levels required, and keep listening to your track. Applying distortion or overdrive to your guitar tone can be a big time-saver. Here we're automating our gain to ramp up, to beef up our chorus.



6 As your mix starts to come together, you may notice that some guitar ideas, riffs or even chord sequences don't hang together as well as others. Or perhaps the interplay of parts is causing confusion. While the initial plan may have been solid, there comes a point when you're going to have to cut anything that doesn't fit with the feel of the song as a whole.

7 In terms of distorted guitars, be careful with your compressor, because, in all honesty, a distorted guitar signal rarely needs it, as the boosting of the signal tends to saturate the dynamic range. Take a close look at your waveform, and apply compression sparingly.

8 While reverb can provide a cohesion to your guitar parts, make sure you don't have competing room types that confuse the sense of reality within the track. Mix bussing reverb to all your guitar tracks (step 4) is definitely encouraged, but don't let these rules stop you from experimenting — it's your song after all.

9 Considering all the points from both parts of this step-by-step should help you understand how guitar typically works in a mix context, and how to affect change and make it a more prominent ingredient. Remember the paramount concern is always the final song.

photo credit: Jean-Marc Giboux / Getty Images

ENGINEER BRUCE SWEDIEN ON THE MAKING OF MICHAEL JACKSON'S THRILLER

41 years ago Michael Jackson released Thriller, the album that went on to become (and is likely to remain) the biggest-selling of all time. Released on 30 November 1982, it spawned seven singles and won eight Grammy Awards, selling around a million copies a week at the height of its popularity.

It transpires that, even with all the talent involved, engineer Bruce Swedien never thought that Thriller would go on to be so successful. "I think anyone who would have the balls to say that is a liar because you don't really know until it gets out in the public and they say 'wow this is really good'," he admits. "All we did was follow Quincy Jones down the path to the greatest music we could possibly make and with a passion for details. Quincy is such a remarkable man to work with - and Michael too. I mean, we had a ball.

"Michael was never late for a session - if anything he would be early. Also, I never remember recording Michael with the lyrics in front of him. He would stay up the night before memorising the song or songs we were about to record. I don't think there are a lot of artists who do that."

Speaking to Bruce, it seems like the album almost flowed out of the studio: "With Michael, there weren't any difficult tracks to mix. Working with Michael and Quincy is easy as pie. They are so musical - and the passion for quality that we share has made working on these projects - especially Thriller - very easy."

Thriller was recorded at Westlake Audio in LA, where Bruce had previously worked. "I love that studio - it's just fantastic," he says. "The room you record in is just as important as the mics. When I record somewhere, I have a collection of 105 microphones - every microphone in there I bought new and no one else has ever used it. That protects my sonic integrity. I got used to that incredible sound. One thing with Westlake Audio was that they knew the value of maintaining the gear."

1. WANNA BE STARTIN' SOMETHIN'

"That track is about Michael's brothers' wives and how they were always creating trouble - that was his inspiration.

"It starts with a lot of percussion. There's some drum machines and some live drums and other things. It's a Univox drum machine. We actually used it a lot on the Brothers Johnson record, and we were using it at that time on Michael's record as well. I think it's an SR55. I still have my own and it still works.

"We DI'd every drum machine to get away from secondary pick-up and reflected sound inside the room. Also, a lot of these drum machines have a lot of low end. Like Roland with the 808; it has bottom end like you wouldn't believe and if you put that through a speaker it's all gone. So direct with a module and everything - boy it was killer.

"I tried a bunch of new things in recording the drums on Michael's record - I had a kick drum cover made. I used to take the front head of the kick drum off and place a couple of real heavy cinder blocks inside to hold it still and weight it. Then, I'd put this cover on and the mic goes inside through a zipper opening in the cover, then you zip it up tight and turn it on and the rest is history."

2. BABY BE MINE

"That's John Robinson playing drums on my drum platform. I still use it and Michael did all his vocals on that drum platform. It's unpainted, unvarnished, about eight feet square and by getting the sound source up off the floor, it prevented secondary pick-up if I was recording other instruments along with whatever was on the drum platform.

"We of course had incredible keyboard players too. We never hired anybody who couldn't play.

"We used the same mic and pre throughout the album - I used my Shure SM7, serial number 232, which is very early. They've made so many SM7s that they don't even put serial numbers on them any more.

"I've been pretty vocal about how much I love that microphone, it's a great mic. It's dynamic of course and it worked just flawlessly with Michael - if you notice you can hear all the lyrics very clearly.

"The mic pre we used was a Neve 1084 - I've got two of them in a gorgeous oak case and I used to carry them with me from session to session. Quincy said that working with me and moving my stuff from studio to studio was like working with the Fifth Army. You need to be that dedicated to the sonic of a project. You need to love what you do."

3. THE GIRL IS MINE

"That was actually the first track we recorded for the album. It was a duet with Michael and Paul McCartney who was an absolute joy to work with. He was such a gentleman, he came to the studio prepared - Linda McCartney was with him and we had a fabulous time.

"We had recorded The Girl Is Mine and it was already out there and released before we had finished the album. Quincy would come in every morning and put on a couple of local radio stations and they were all playing The Girl Is Mine, so that would make you very serious about your work very quickly.

"Interestingly, we always recorded with Michael in the dark - he hated light. I mean I would have a little bit of light for him, but the studio was absolutely dark. I think one reason why he wanted this - and why it works so effectively - is that through my study of acoustics and so on, I found that the human being is primarily a visual animal, hearing is our second sense. People can be distracted by too much light in the studio to the extent that it can take away from the music."

4. THRILLER

"When we did Thriller the song, the opening in particular, Rob Temperton - who wrote the track - had conceived us to have wolf howls in it. At the time there was a Sherlock Holmes movie, The Hound of The Baskervilles, that had this huge dog - a Great Dane - in it that did some howling and of course I had that in my mind's ear.

"I automatically thought of my Great Dane who I figured ought to be in showbusiness! So I tried to get him to do those howls and you know what? He never did it. We put him up in the barn at night to listen to the coyotes and I had my tape machine ready to record him. He was a fantastic dog, 200lbs, his name was Max. I thought 'wouldn't this be great to have him doing those howls on the record' but he just never got it together! He didn't want to be in showbusiness.

"But you know who it is that is doing those wolf howls? That's Michael Jackson, we had to get Michael to do it instead, but he did it so great. There's some library stuff in there but Michael did those wolf howls.

"And of course we had Vincent Price in for the spoken-word part. He was great. There's a great story about Rod Temperton writing the lyrics for that part in the taxi on the way over to the studio!

"For the creaking doors, I went to Universal Studios in Hollywood, the movie lot, and rented two or three sound effects doors and brought them to Westlake and spent a whole day auditioning these doors and miked the hinges real close. That is a real door and I recorded that and added it on the track. Come to think of it, that might have been Michael doing those footsteps too, actually."

5. BEAT IT

"Oh boy - the intro synth was a stock Synclavier patch; any Synclavier will make that sound. We liked it but we wanted everything to be unrecognisable, unique, so we didn't want to use that sound, but Michael loved it and made us keep it.

"The highlight for me was the guitar solo. That guitar solo is incredible - when Eddie [Van Halen] came in to play, he was in Studio B at Westlake and I was in Studio A with Michael and Quincy, but I went in there when he was tuning and warming up

and I left immediately. It was so loud, I would never subject my hearing to that kind of volume level! I didn't record that solo, I hired his engineer - I figured his hearing would probably be a little suspect right now anyway. I then did the mix after it was recorded.

"In terms of miking amps, I usually did either XY or occasionally Blumlein pair and I still do it the same. I think it was a [Neumann] U67 used on the amp for Beat It.

6. BILLIE JEAN

"This track was really personal - Michael was at his home in Havenhurst and some girl snuck over the wall. She was lounging about the swimming pool - of course the security guards came and threw her out but eventually she sued Michael for being the father of one of her twins. It was pretty ridiculous.

"The bass on this was fantastic - the bass player is Louis Johnson from the Brothers Johnson and I picked him up with a DI, which I still have - it's got a UTC transformer in it and I got it when I lived in Chicago and the low-end is incredible - very warm.

"The drums on this track are great - I had a wall of gobos set around the drums which helped the separation quite a bit. I had an SM57 on the snare, RCA 77DX on the hat, [Neumann] U67 on each of the toms and I used a Sennheiser on the kick drum - I can't remember exactly which one. And then a pair of U67s for the overheads and that sounded pretty clean.

"The thing that stands out for me is that I recorded the whole rhythm section on Thriller onto a 16-track tape deck and not 24-track. I had been using 24-track at the time, but the noise floor was so high that it made it a bit difficult so I worked in 16-track with no noise reduction to get what I wanted. Straight into the machine without any noise reduction at all, the result is hard to beat!

"I even went so far as to have my pal George Massenburg's absolutely spectacular-sounding 12-input portable console brought over to record the rhythm section.

"The main reverb we used was the EMT 250. I still have one and use it on all my projects. I also have an EMT 252 with the 250 software in it which is a superb sounding reverb and I also use a couple of Lexicons.

"For the strings on Billie Jean I was aiming for a real classical sound - not a pop sound at all. When I started my work in Chicago a few years earlier I had recorded the symphony orchestra so I know what a great orchestral recording can sound like. I don't think there are any basses on those strings but it was violin, viola and cellos and it was absolutely classical in the approach."

7. HUMAN NATURE

"That was a track written by Steve Porcaro of Toto [with John Bettis]. He played and programmed a lot of the synths. It's a really incredible piece of music; it's so different, and Michael sings it so well. I don't remember what synths were used on it but it was real easy to mix that track because it's so well conceived. He's a phenomenal musician."

8. P.Y.T.

"P.Y.T. was written by James Ingram and Quincy Jones - a great stone R&B hit. We used a lot of Minimoog - our synth programmer who was there all the time was Michael Boddicker. He programmed the Minimoog and he owned the best-sounding synths at the time. There was variation on every analogue synth and he kept his very well maintained.

"We used to call him Lily, actually - Lily Tomlin was a big star at the time and she played a character where she was a switchboard operator with patch chords around her neck. Michael Boddicker used to walk around the studio with patch chords around his neck so Quincy started calling him Lily.

9. THE LADY IN MY LIFE

"Rod Temperton wrote that. Rod is very different from anyone else I've ever known in the music business - he's the most disciplined pop music composer I've ever met. When he comes to the studio, every musical detail is written down or accounted for in Rod's mind. He never stops until he feels confident that the music we're working on is able to stand on its own.

"Rod and Quincy are two of the real giants in the industry. I'll never forget the time Rod asked me to check out a band called Heatwave, from the UK. Rod was working with them and he had such an American approach to his sound and music but he's from Grimsby. He has an intrinsic appreciation of urban values in popular music - I mean the real ghetto stuff.

"There were some young guys writing songs for Michael and they had never met Rod and they heard his music and they thought he was cool. But when they met him they said 'Rod, I thought you were young and black! But you're old! And white! ...And British!'". RO

Shure SE215 Pro

Experience high-fidelity sound for less with a pair of Shure's excellent SE215 in-ear monitors. Review by **James Farmer**

RRP: $199

Shure has been one of the biggest names in live music gear for as long as we can remember. If you play, sing or go to live gigs, you've probably heard the sound of a Shure vocal microphone or guitar mic - and while Shure is primarily a microphone manufacturer, they also create some next-level studio headphones and in-ear monitors for us all to enjoy. If an in-ear monitoring system is something you've been considering and you're on a budget, then the Shure SE215 Pros should be very near the top of your list (Unlike the brilliant but pricey Shure SE846 Pro in-ear monitors we reviewed last issue).

So, in-ear monitors then. Not to be confused with the humble earphone, a great pair of in-ears will do an awful lot to help you sound and play better. There are many different manufacturers all vying for your attention and hard-earned cash, and many different price points for you to explore when looking for a pair of in-ear monitors. Obviously if you pay more, you get more - but do you really need more? That answer is probably no.

Out of the box, the SE215 Pros look like a pretty smart, lower profile in-ear. The construction is pretty basic, with either clear, black or blue plastic 'phones on offer. They're nothing groundbreaking, but perfectly adequate for something that is going to sit in your ear for a few hours at a time. The box also contains some added extras - a zippered carrying case, cleaning/fitting tool and various different sizes of foam and silicone sleeves to ensure you get a comfortable and tight fit.

The cable is detachable, to allow for easier packaging and to avoid any damage or over-bending when wrapping them up after a performance or rehearsal. If your cable does get damaged - as can happen with earphones and headphones of all price brackets - then the cable is easily replaceable. No stress, huh?

Speaking of the cable, it's just your standard 3.5mm mini jack connector - making it ideal for most applications. Lined with wire, the cable stays pretty straight during use, without excessive tangling or twisting. A rubber sleeve and extra wire reinforcement makes sure the cable doesn't move around too much, and that the fit around your ears is sturdy. Having cable wrapping around the tops of your ears can feel a little alien at first - particularly if you're brand new to in-ears - but we had forgotten it was there within the first 10 to 15 minutes of use.

The SE215 Pro's main focus lies within the earpiece itself: a single, high-definition driver. Considering a vast majority of in-ear monitors contain at least two (sometimes more) drivers, this is remarkable in itself - but what is more remarkable is the soundstage that this single driver creates.

In all of the musical scenarios we've been able to put the SE215 Pros through - heavy touring with rock bands, lounge jazz gigs and studio recording sessions, to name a few - they sounded smooth and capable, and not noticeably pokey or tinny. Like any pair of earphones or IEM's, a little distortion was noted in some slightly more manic areas or when the volume was boosted just that little bit too high, but the SE215 Pro came out from that barrage of testing largely unscathed.

One of the issues we always run into with in-ear monitors is the issue of ambient noise cancellation and sound bleed. The SE215 Pros offer some really useful and effective isolation from the sounds around you. This is thanks to the shape and size of the casing itself, which forms a fairly decent seal when sat in your ear. Especially when playing live, you want a decent amount of separation between your own in-ear mix and what's going on elsewhere, without feeling like you're playing on your own. The Shure's fit in that middle ground very well, with small but reassuring ambient levels of sound passing through.

Now, it's absolutely worth bearing in mind that the SE215 Pros are not high-end in-ear monitors. As an entry to the world of IEM's they're a very respectable choice, but they won't quite capture the spacious ambience of a multi-driver setup, or the wide frequency range of more expensive in-ears. That being said, what do you expect for under $200? We can't think of another pair of budget in-ear monitors that combine audio and build quality with reputation and comfort like Shure does with the SE215 Pros. For those who are newbies to the world of IEM's - take a good look at these. We don't think you'll be disappointed.

▶ VERDICT

The Shure SE215 Pro in-ear monitors are a brilliant budget option, whether you're looking for your first ever monitoring system, a pair of backup IEM's or just some killer multi-use earphones.

▶ PROS

- Decent bass.
- Great value for money.
- Shure há an excellent reputation.

▶ CONS

- Only one driver.

▶ CONTACT

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Gretsch G5222 Electromatic Double Jet BT V-Stoptail & G5232T Electromatic Double Jet FT with Bigsby

The rare double-cutaway Jet is making waves in Gretsch's Electromatic line-up. With new versions announced last year, including left-handed models, we finally get a chance to plug in. Review by **Dave Burrluck**

Yet another example of the escalating quality of Eastern Asian manufacturing, both of these Chinese-made double-cut Jet models are superbly put together. In fact, the only issues we had were from transit damage: guitars this good (irrespective of their price) need better packaging. But with our G5222's three-way toggle switch replaced and resoldered, there's not a hair out of place. So, what's the deal?

As you'll know, back when Gretsch's 'solidbodies' first appeared in the 50s, they used a chambered semi-solid design, despite looking like they were solid. It's the same deal today. The mahogany back is routed out leaving a central block under the pickups and bridge; the pickup routs are really deep (the bridge pickup's is 50mm, the neck's slightly less), while more wood is removed in the middle of that block.

The top, meanwhile, is solid maple, not a laminate like the originals, and overall both check in under 4kg. On both our models, the top is very cleanly edge-bound and nicely dished, violin-like, and the backs are completely flat with no contours. The rim depth is a little over 49mm; the overall depth is a very Les Paul-like 60mm. It does look smaller than the single-cut Jet, and there's less mass thanks to the mirroring of the treble cutaway and horn on the bass side. But, like the single-cut model, it's still pretty Les Paul-like with a 342mm (13.5-inch) width. Likewise with the scale length, which mirrors Gibson's actual scale at 625mm (24.6 inches). There's quite a chunky, full-depth heel here with a rather squared front, but access to the upper frets is certainly easier than a single-cut Les Paul, thanks in part to the double-cutaway.

The fingerboards are laurel and come across as pretty rosewood-like in colour, especially on our G5232T Bigsby model, albeit with a slightly more stripped grain, while the G5222's 'board is a little paler in colour that its review partner. We get well-installed, quite wide and low frets, which have been really well polished on both our samples, alongside those classy 'thumbnail' or 'half-moon' pearloid markers. The setups are good as well, although with nut widths just over 43mm, we'd say that the 34mm string spacing could certainly be widened.

Of course, the hardware is pretty generic, but

we do get that proprietary 'V' stop tailpiece on our G5222, plus the chromed G-Arrow knobs and screw-on knurled-edge strap buttons. The plastic pickup rings and pickguard are colour-dependent, and those Gretsch-style pickup rings are really classy with nicely rounded edges. The pickups use three height-adjustment/fixing screws, which means you can tilt the pickups to directly match the sloping angle of the strings. You do need to remove the pickguard in order to adjust the height on the treble side of the neck pickup, but that's hardly a dealbreaker.

As always, you'll need to stretch your strings well if you want the Bigbsy on the G5232T to come back perfectly in tune, but it is pretty good: light waggles held the tuning without adding any lubrication to the saddles. All in, a good job.

Gretsch likes to use its 'Thin U' description of the neck shape, but in reality it's not particularly thin in depth nor 'U' shaped. We'd call it more of a shallow 'C'. Depth-wise, though, these are pretty mainstream necks, measuring 21.5mm at the 1st fret and just over 23mm by the 12th, very similar to the Streamliners we've tested and not dissimilar to Yamaha's Mk II Revstars. The frets measure around 2.64mm wide with a low-ish height of approximately 1mm. As we said, they're nicely installed and polished, and the ends sit over the binding. The action height came in as 1.3mm on both the treble and bass sides of our G5232T, and only slightly higher on the G5222.

Although the construction is a little different from the early 60s, our FT model sounds unmistakably Gretsch. It's not just the bright voicing; there's that subtle sparkle – almost like two single coils are blended together – and a little bark from the bridge that's contrasted by a choppy attack at the neck. Comparing the Filter'Tron-equipped G5232 with a set of TV Jones Classics (on a semi-hollow PRS S2), it does sound a little underpowered and more polite, but the character is definitely there. It's certainly more of a single coil-y humbucker sound, evidenced by the Burstbuckers 1 and 2 on our Les Paul Classic, which might be considered clean and quite bright for a PAF-style but now sound bigger and louder compared with the Gretsch.

The Broad'Tron pickups on our G5222 could be called 'Filter'Tron Plus'. Irrespective of what is under the pickup covers, they add a little more power and grit, but seem to sit right between those Filter'Trons and the BurstBuckers in terms of output; they're actually closer in that regard to the TV Jones Classics. Already, we're thinking that a Broad'Tron at the bridge and a Filter'Tron at the neck might be our favourite, particularly with a little AC/DC crunch. There's a little more bark from the BroadTron's bridge pickup, but the neck loses a little clarity compared with that Filter'Tron.

You may wind all the controls full up and just leave 'em there, but that master volume is a great feature, especially when you're gigging. This is something of note on the vibrato model, where the arm gets in the way a bit of the individual pickup controls, but less so the lower master tone when the guitar is in playing position. While the treble bleed circuit on the master volume does keep things pretty bright as you pull it back, there is still a little extra sizzle when full up. The volume tapers do feel a little slow, too, but there's really nothing wrong here.

That said, the double-cut outline does mean the upper strap button moves out and more into the body than the single-cut Jet, and while that's not really an issue when you're playing away, we'd suggest a textured strap to prevent neck dive.

We can't help wondering whether brands such as Gretsch are shooting themselves in the foot. The high-quality build and finishing here is simply superb – regardless of the price – and there's really nothing wrong with any of the sounds we hear. Okay, we don't get gigbags, but not for the first time we found ourselves double-checking the prices, which are lower still in-store.

Electromatics have certainly found favour in the modding community, too, and you could use either of these as a basis for pickup, electronics and parts upgrades, but we have to say, as is, these are really fit for quite serious use.

▶ VERDICT

These are some seriously cool guitars that won't break the bank - in fact, their price is remarkably low. That's good enough for us.

▶ PROS

- Excellent build, setup and playability.
- Good weight.
- Classic Gretsch style and slightly hotter sounds to match.

▶ CONS

- No gigbag.
- Neck dive potential withou textured strap.

▶ CONTACT

FENDER AUSTRALIA
Ph: 0281981300
Web: fender.com/en-au/

RRP: $899

Recording King G6 Series Solid Top Dreadnaught Cutaway

Recording King takes a swing at the crowded cutaway dreadnaught market in their own inimitable way. Review by **Peter Hodgson**

Recording King is one of those quiet achievers of the acoustic guitar world. The brand traces its history to the 1930s when it was used as a house label for Montgomery Ward, the American mail-order retailer. Now owned by The Music Link Corporation in Hayward, California, Recording King guitars are distributed in Australia by EGM Distribution, and the catalog includes a variety of instruments with top-end vintage-style and modern appointments such as solid rosewood and solid mahogany bodies, Adirondack spruce tops, herringbone purfling, tortoise-shell binding, Fishman electronics, hand-spun European resonator cones and distressed authentic Bell Brass bodies.

The G6 Series Solid Top Dreadnaught Cutaway is a great example of what Recording King offers in the traditional acoustic guitar market. (They also offer a wide range of resonator guitars from affordable to pricey and with all sorts of unique features and looks.) In many ways the G6 Dreadnaught is a classic dreadnaught. It features a solid Spruce top with Mahogany back and sides and a fully-scalloped forward X bracing pattern (the top braces are Spruce too).

The Mahogany neck features a Revebond fingerboard, a material whose details Recording King seems to keep pretty close to its chest, but it appears to be a composite material developed to feel like a familiar midpoint between rosewood and ebony. It's certainly becoming more common for instrument makers to use non-traditional construction materials for fingerboards as regulations and supply chains impact the industry, and Revebond feels pretty consistent with what one would expect an instrument fingerboard to feel like, so no beef here. There are 20 frets, with 14 clear of the body, and a complement of traditional pearl dot inlays. The headstock is overlaid with Pau Ferro and carries six half-moon nickel tuning machines. The guitar body is bound in the same faux tortoiseshell that makes up the scratch plate and the sound hole rosette for a nice consistent 'designed' look.

Electronics are handled by a Fishman Presys I system, a quite simple system which includes an onboard tuner with a nice bright display, a Phase switch for reducing feedback, and a Contour button which re-voices the tone profile. This basic system lets you switch between a natural, flat EQ response with the Contour disengaged, or a more scooped sound with reduced midrange and enhanced high and low end when Contour is turned on. All pretty straightforward.

The first thing I noticed when I picked up this guitar was the sheer beauty of the back and sides. There's a three-dimensional shimmer to the wood grain and finish. It looks like caramel sauce or maple syrup, and it dances under the light with such elegance and beauty that it's kind of a shame that your audience won't see it. It's indicative of the finishing quality throughout the instrument, and is all the more impressive when you consider the guitar's affordable price.

Sonically, the G6 sounds like exactly what it appears to be: a nice dreadnaught. There's a solid, tight character to the low end and a nice crisp clarity to the highs, along with impressive natural sustain and a rich but not overpowering warmth to the midrange. This is a guitar that sounds equally at home with folk fingerpicking or aggressive strumming, and the solid top ensures that it projects very nicely when you pick especially hard.

The neck is quite comfortable whether you're an experienced acoustic player or a predominantly electric guitarist making the switch to occasional acoustic. It's the kind of 'not too round, not too flat, not too deep, not too skinny' profile that immediately feels comfortable in your hand but is hard to describe on the page. Lead guitarists will also appreciate the upper fret access: while the spec sheet lists this model as having 14 frets clear of the body, that only counts if you're going from the bass side, because the treble side cutaway doesn't begin until the 16th fret and even then it's not particularly difficult to access at least up to the 18th before you find yourself starting to angle your fretting hand in a slightly awkward way to reach the last couple of notes.

The Fishman preamp is a good dependable way of getting your tone out of your guitar and into a PA system or recording interface, but some players may feel a little bit constrained by its relative lack of features compared to many other models in the Fishman range. You may find yourself augmenting it with additional processing or a different preamp, and Fishman offers some great options in its Aura series if this sounds like you.

But it feels a little bit cheeky to demand more from this guitar than it is already offering, since it's so heavily spec'd out and carefully crafted at such an affordable price.

▶ VERDICT

There are dreadnoughts out there with more character or more specifically oriented neck profiles (more fingerstyle-friendly vs strummers, for example) but in terms of attainable, accessible all-rounders that sound great and are built decently, this is a hard guitar to fault.

▶ PROS

- Beautiful finish.
- Nice fretwork.
- Playable neck.

▶ CONS

- Basic preamp may be a bit simple for some.

▶ CONTACT

EGM DISTRIBUTION
Ph: (03) 9817 7222
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Earthquaker Devices Special Cranker

A handy medium overdrive that offers a warm, tube-like crunch like an extension of your amp. Review by **Christopher Scapelliti**

RRP: $179

Many seasons ago, Akron-based effects maker EarthQuaker Devices rocked guitarists' world with a little box called the Speaker Cranker. Featuring just one knob, labeled "More," it could push your speaker to the edge of breakup without dramatically coloring your tone or affecting transparency. The result was thicker, crunchier power chords and singing leads that bloomed with rich harmonics and an almost full-frequency response. The Speaker Cranker is out of production, but in its place EarthQuaker presents the Special Cranker, a pedal that builds upon the Speaker Cranker with more controls and clipping diode options.

The Special Cranker continues where the Speaker Cranker left off. It's a medium-gain overdrive that delivers more saturation without altering your amp's organic nuances or character. It's as spongy, dynamic and touch sensitive as its predecessor but with more gain, twice the output volume (via the level knob) and a tone control. It also has, notably, two flavors of gain courtesy of a small toggle: Si (silicon diode), which offers the asymmetrical silicone diodes of the original for a brighter edge and higher output; and Ge (germanium), for a darker tone and a softer response.

The tone control comes in handy here for managing treble frequencies. Turning it counterclockwise tames the high end — useful with Si mode selected — while a clockwise spin delivers a slight boost to help brighten the Ge side. Park it at three o'clock for flat response. Level, meanwhile, takes your volume from zero to nearly double, with unity gain between 10 and 12 o'clock, depending on which diode is selected. The More control adjusts the bias of the transistor, so it's normal to hear some noise as the knob is turned, although this varies depending on your pickups and their output.

Tested with humbucker- and single-coil-equipped guitars through a Fender '68 Custom Princeton Reverb, the Special Cranker was a real treat, especially since I'm admittedly not fond of extreme overdrive. Aside from a slight decrease in bass response, the pedal let my guitar's tone come through, adding saturation and sustain and enriching harmonics to make everything

I played sound livelier, thicker and crunchier. Obviously, what you get from the Special Cranker has a lot to do with your pickups,

but the bottom line here is that the pedal behaves like it's part of your amp, helping you home in on the frequencies you want while delivering warm, tube-like crunch that increases in complexity as you turn the More knob clockwise.

Having both silicon and germanium diode options only adds to the pedal's usefulness. Granted, if you're accustomed to high-gain germanium tones, you may find the Special Cranker's medium-gain overdrive more polite than you're used to. On the other hand, the silicon side is bright and robust, with a gorgeous bloom. The low mids sound fatter than on the germanium side, but chords remained distinct, without becoming muddy.

As you might expect, the Special Cranker features EarthQuaker's Flexi-Switch foot switch that allows both momentary and latched switching. I especially like that the pedal can be operated from nine to 18 volts for increased headroom, one more impressive feature on a pedal that has enough to begin with.

▶ VERDICT

If you're not a player who wants or needs tons of overdrive, or if you just want a versatile medium overdrive that sounds like an extension of your amp, the Special Cranker deserves a look.

▶ PROS

- Touch-sensitive medium gain tones.
- Feels like an extension of your amp.
- Ell-selected and useful gain flavours.

▶ CONS

- Germanium setting too polite for higher-gain lovers.

▶ CONTACT

YAMAHA MUSIC AUSTRALIA
Ph: (03) 9693 5111
Web: au.yamaha.com

Blackstar Dept. 10 Amped 1

Following last year's release of the award-winning Dept. 10 valve pedals, Blackstar's multi-function, paperback-sized new tone machine has arrived to cover any need. Review by **Nick Guppy**

RRP: $799

Blackstar's rise to fame as one of the world's leading guitar amplification manufacturers is well documented, and one of the reasons it's arrived at the top and stayed there is that the team never seems to stop innovating. Almost every month, or so it seems, there's something new to tempt us and now it's the turn of Blackstar's Dept. 10, its 'blue sky' research and development team. Hot on the heels of last year's multi-award-winning valve Dual Drive, Dual Distortion and Boost pedals, the latest product to bear the Dept. 10 moniker is the Amped 1, a 100-watt multi-function amplifier in a package small enough to fit on your pedalboard.

Like all Blackstar products, the Amped 1 is smartly presented with clean, uncluttered cosmetics. The electronics are contained inside a tough chassis with a white enamelled aluminium faceplate and a contrasting black steel base. There's very little space inside, yet everything is neatly laid out, with mostly SMD components on high-quality printed circuit boards.

The Amped 1 is basically a single-channel design, with a choice of three preamp voices and six power amp response options. The top-facing controls are straightforward and easy to navigate, with knobs for Gain, Bass, Middle, Treble and a Master volume. There's also a level control for Amped 1's digital reverb, and a six-way rotary switch that changes the power amp response to emulate KT88, 6L6, EL34, 6V6 and EL84 output valves, with a Linear option for when you want the amplification to be transparent. There are LED indicators for all the switches, as well as an illuminated Blackstar logo.

A small three-way toggle switch selects from USA or UK preamp voicings, with a third option called Flat for use with external modelling preamps. Another three-way toggle switch selects three output levels, from one watt to 20 watts and the full-power 100-watt option.

There are two footswitches: the left one toggles the built-in reverb and also activates a cool Freeze function, while the right-hand switch can be used to save and recall a snapshot of the control settings. On the right-hand side of the pedal you'll find the mono XLR and stereo jack headphones/line outputs for the Amped 1's built-in Cab Rig speaker emulation, with a three-way preset selector switch and a Level control.

The busy back panel includes a switched universal mains connector, a single input jack, a USB 'C' socket for direct recording and connection to Blackstar's Architect desktop app, and an effects loop that can be configured for series or parallel operation. There's a pair of nine-volt DC outlets for powering external stompboxes up to a total current draw of 500mA, and a pair of speaker outlets for eight and 16-ohm cabinets. The Amped 1's MIDI in socket uses a space-saving 3.5mm TRS (Tip Ring Send) jack instead of the usual five-pin DIN socket, while the effects loop uses a 6.35mm TRS socket for audio send and return. Adaptors for both are included, along with a USB 'A' to 'C' lead, for desktop connection.

The other dominant feature on the rear panel is a small fan, which pulls in air to cool the internals, exiting from a perforated grille in the front, under the footswitches.

We tried out Blackstar's Amped 1 with our usual selection of guitars, including an old Strat loaded with Duncan Alnico Pro single coils and a PAF-equipped Les Paul. Used with a 1x12 Vintage 30-loaded cabinet, the Amped 1 is practically silent at switch-on, with just the faintest whirr from the cooling fan. Some fan-equipped amps can be intrusive at low volume; the fan on the Amped 1 is so quiet it's quickly forgotten.

The USA preamp voice is low gain and high headroom, making it ideal for pedals as well as country picking and jazz, with a sweet high-end, warm bass and a gently scooped midrange. The UK voice has more gain and a punchy, dynamic midrange that evokes classic British heads from the late 1970s and early 80s. We'd class this voice as medium gain, with more than enough drive for crunch, blues and classic rock sounds. The third voice, called Flat, is intended for use with external modelling preamps. For this voice the EQ controls function in semi-parametric mode, with everything neutral at the 12 o'clock setting.

The Amped 1's virtual output valve settings will be familiar to Blackstar Silverline owners, with a choice of five distinct output valve responses, including KT88, 6L6, EL34, 6V6 and EL84 options, together with a linear setting intended to work in tandem with the Flat preamp voice, for when external modellers are being used to emulate amp responses. The virtual output valves are spookily authentic, providing a progressive increase in output stage compression and distortion as you move from the bold and very dynamic Class AB KT88 setting, through to the Class A compression and chime of the EL84. To hear the output stage differences better at lower volume levels, you can reduce the Amped 1's full-on 100 watts to 20 watts or just one watt, which is still plenty loud enough for home practice but lets you crank the master volume a little more.

The digital reverb is toggled on and off by the Reverb footswitch, which can also be held down to activate a cool Freeze function, extending the reverb decay time to create synth-like pad effects.

For live use, the Amped 1 delivers its full power into either the eight or 16-ohm speaker output jacks, producing more than enough volume on the 100-watt setting to handle any gig, large or small.

We said the Amped 1 is best described as a single-channel amp, but with the exception of output power and master volume, you can store and recall your control settings into a single onboard memory slot, using the Preset footswitch. Saving a preset is a simple matter of holding down the footswitch for a couple of seconds until the LED flashes. To make editing easier, there's a handy 'recall' LED by the Gain knob that flashes when the original control value is met. Switching Preset off reverts to the sound of the current control settings, so it's possible to operate the Amped 1 as a semi-two-channel amp – for example, using a manually dialled-in rhythm sound that can be switched to a saved lead voice.

The Amped 1 also includes Blackstar's excellent Cab Rig speaker emulation, which gives you dynamic control of a virtual room environment, including room, cabinet and microphone type and positioning. The Cab Rig outputs are on the right-hand side of the unit's chassis, with a mono balanced XLR and stereo headphones/line out, together with a Level control and a three-position preset selector switch. You can also record the stereo Cab Rig output via USB, along with a non-effected preamp output and a dry guitar sound, for reamping. The Amped 1 can also receive audio from a computer for monitoring or backing-track playback.

The Cab Rig settings are accessed, edited and stored using Blackstar's Architect desktop app, which connects via a USB 'C' socket on the rear panel. Architect edits the rest of the Amped 1 controls, too, along with several hidden functions including reverb type, loop configuration and firmware updating. The app's clean, uncluttered graphics and logical layout make it very easy to use. Plugged into a DAW via USB, the Cab Rig sounds are superb, providing highly realistic room emulations that can be edited in real-time, needing little or no EQ to sit perfectly in a mix and keeping the creative process spontaneous by saving hours that might be wasted scrolling through static IRs.

If you wrote a list of all the features you'd want to see in the perfect pedalboard amplifier, Blackstar's Amped 1 would probably have every box ticked. Weighing in at just over 1kg and roughly the same size as an average paperback, it's highly portable. You can use it as a standalone amp or you can not only amplify your pedalboard but also power it using the external DC outlets, provided the total current draw is under 500mA. If you have a modelling preamp, you can also use the Amped 1 as a flat-response mini PA system.

While it's great for live gigs, it really shines in the studio where the integrated Cab Rig's dynamic cabinet emulations reduce the time needed to get great recorded tones to a few seconds.

▶ VERDICT

Aimed at serious players at all levels, we think it's great value for money when you look at what's on offer. Whatever your equipment setup, the Amped 1's inspiring features and superb tones will open the door to all kinds of creative possibilities.

▶ PROS

- Good looking and highly portable.
- Covers both in-studio and live needs.
- Super-low noise performance.

▶ CONS

- 'Freeze' function could be traded with foot switchable reverb.
- App needed - offline mode would be nice.

▶ CONTACT

CMI

Web: cmi.com.au

RRP: $TBC

Laney Supergroup LA-Studio head

The latest from Laney's flagship UK-designed and made Supergroup range offers real vintage valve tone combined with Two Notes cab emulation. Review by **Nick Guppy**

History tends to focus on London and Liverpool as the two main epicentres of British popular music in the late 1960s, but there were others, of course, and one of the most notable was the West Midlands. From this area came Black Sabbath, The Move (which evolved into Electric Light Orchestra) and glam-rock legends Slade, among others. Back then, Laney founder Lyndon Laney was playing in a group called Band Of Joy, a collective of Black Country musicians that included Robert Plant and John Bonham. Lyndon's early interest in electronics and amplifiers led to him building his own – at first in his parent's garden shed and then in a unit in Digbeth as the business took off.

Ever since, Laney Amplification has successfully charted its own course through popular music trends and the ups and downs of British manufacturing. Today, its enviable user list includes Tony Iommi, Vernon Reid and Brazilian virtuoso Lari Basilio, with a resurgence of interest in the amp that drove what would become heavy metal – the Mark 1 Supergroup. Alongside the current reissued LA100SM and LA30BL heads, Laney recently introduced this specialised low-output recording version we have on review, the LA-Studio, which features built-in Two Notes Torpedo cabinet emulation technology.

The LA-Studio is a well-presented, good-looking compact head, styled to evoke the look of vintage Laneys from the late 60s. Attention to detail is everywhere, from the neatly applied white stringing around the plywood sleeve and salt-and-pepper grille, to the recessed serial number plate on the rear panel. We especially like the large skirted control knobs, which lend authentic vintage mojo to the LA-Studio and look very cool over the white-acrylic control panel.

The electronics are supported on a steel chassis with welded corners. There's a pair of small mains and output transformers and a choke, while inside the chassis most of the components live on two high-quality printed circuit boards. The main board includes sockets for all four of the LA-Studio's valves: a trio of 12AX7s in the preamp and a single 12BH7 which is best thought of as a larger version of the 12AX7 and produces around three watts with both halves running in a Class AB push-pull configuration. The output board holds the Two Notes speaker emulation chip, built-in reactive load and all the associated rear panel connectors. The build and wiring standard is excellent – this amp was made to look good and last.

The LA-Studio is a single channel, non-master volume design with a three-band passive EQ and a traditional presence control operating in the output stage. There are two pairs of input jacks named Bass and Treble. Bass provides a flattish response and works best with pedals, while Treble has extra highs and upper mids. Both the Treble and Bass inputs have low and high gain options – input 1 is high gain, while input 2 is lower gain, and you can get more tonal variation by jumpering the input jacks with a short patch cable.

Next to the power switch is a second toggle that selects the LA-Studio's Brake power reduction, dropping output from around three to 0.1 watts, for quiet practice or conventional recording.

The rear panel is where you'll find the ins and outs for the LA-Studio's Two Notes Torpedo cabinet emulation – it's a full install with a few more features than we've seen on other similarly equipped amps. There's a six-position cabinet selector and a Level control, with a Peak level indicator, MIDI In/Out/Thru sockets and a ground lift switch. Outputs include a 3.5mm headphone jack and a mono balanced XLR for connection to consoles or your favourite audio interface.

A USB 'B' socket lets you access the Two Notes tech with the Torpedo Remote desktop app, from where you can edit, save, store and load your favourite settings into the LA-Studio's six onboard slots. The built-in high-quality reactive load means the LA-Studio can be used without a speaker cabinet, sending audio to the DI and headphones without any loss of tone or dynamics. There's a pair of eight- and 16-ohm speaker jacks as well, so you can connect to any cabinet with a matching impedance. Overall, Laney's LA-Studio is a serious professional tool, with build quality and good looks to match.

We tried out the LA-Studio with a selection of guitars, including our Strat and Les Paul, together with a superb borrowed '63 reissue Gibson ES-335. Used into a 1x12 Creamback-loaded cabinet, the LA-Studio has a warm and very dynamic tone with a sweet treble, which sounds spot on for late-60s and early 70s classic rock. There's just the right amount of bite from our Strat's bridge pickup and a satisfying crunch from the Les Paul, with smooth vocal soloing from the 335.

There's no master volume, but with a maximum output of three watts it can be turned all the way up without being unsociably loud. For occasions when even three watts is too much, engaging the Brake attenuator drops the output down to a miniscule 0.1 watts – quiet enough to talk over, even with the controls on maximum.

The passive EQ is excellent; the Bass, Mid and Treble controls interact smoothly and predictably, with no troublesome peaks or dips. The amp stays more or less clean until around the halfway mark, after which it begins to distort in a very pleasing way with just a hint of fuzzbox at full tilt.

Like most other Two Notes-equipped products, the emulation doesn't appear on the main speaker, so you need to use the headphones or DI output to hear it. We plugged the LA-Studio into a small PA to check out the six virtual cab presets, all of which were more or less usable straight out of the box. The Torpedo remote app is a breeze to use and lets you experiment with all kinds of parameters including cabinet type, room size and microphone position to dial in your ideal virtual recording environments. With just a few minutes of tweaking, it's possible to create highly realistic virtual cabinets and rooms that sound superb, saving hours of time auditioning hundreds of IRs to find the one you need. If your rig is powered by MIDI, you'll be pleased to hear the Two Notes module also accepts Program Change and Continuous Controller commands.

Laney is on a roll at the moment with a full catalogue of products to suit any musical genre, and the LA-Studio is another desirable addition. The Two Notes cabinet emulation gives the amp practically infinite flexibility, saving your DAW's processing power for other things in the studio, with the potential for live use when connected to a PA. In this scenario, it's ideal for quiet stage applications such as theatres and churches, with the built-in reactive load replacing a conventional loudspeaker, while sending the LA-Studio's cabinet-emulated output to a console.

With famous users including Tony Iommi and Lari Basilio, the LA-Studio is aimed primarily at guitarists who want full-on vintage valve sounds for recording or internet broadcast.

▶ VERDICT

It's hardly an impulse purchase, but with everything considered, we reckon it's great value for money. Definitely one to check out.

▶ PROS

- Good looking and beautifully finished.
- Typically high attention to detail.
- Accurate vintage valve sound.

▶ CONS

- Low power output means can't be used unmic'd at the pub.
- A higher-powered combo version would be nice.

▶ CONTACT

AUSTRALASIAN MUSIC SUPPLIES
Ph: 0395491500
Web: austmusic.com.au

RRP: $1,550 / $1,795

Markbass Little Mark 58R / MB58R 102 PURE

Markbass redefines the parameters of tone, power and portability. Review by **Steve Henderson**

The clever folk at Markbass continue to push the boundaries of what a professional bass system should deliver. In this case, we're talking about a punchy, full-featured, gig bag-sized amp head and a lightweight, rear-ported 2x10 cab. Both are dressed in Markbass' usual orange-on-black livery, and both offer simple and practical features.

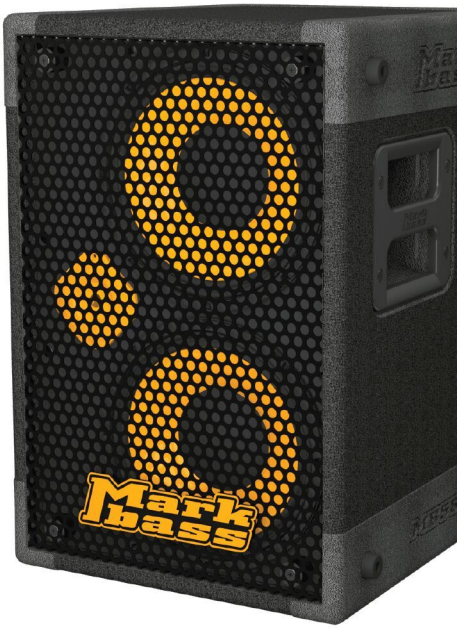
The speaker cab heralds a new direction in weight reduction – even for Markbass. The previous 2x10 record holder, the Markbass 102P, weighs in at a very portable 14.5kgs. This new 400w 2x10 cab is just 10.5kgs and is still full featured. The 10 inch speakers are MB's high-powered neodymium drivers, plus there's a new hi-fidelity tweeter for the super-high end. If you're after a more vintage tone, the tweeter can be easily bypassed via a rear-mounted defeat switch. Or, it can be activated but tempered with three levels of attenuation: -6db, -9db, and -15db. The differences are subtle but very effective, and much easier to set-and-forget than an attenuation knob. The MB's new composite material accounts for the weight reduction but proves no less punchy than a cab built with traditional materials. And, due to its composite material, it's probably the world's first eco-friendly speaker box.

The Little Mark 58R amp head is small and super-lightweight, providing 500w of everything you need and nothing you don't. At 276mm long and 83mm high, and weighing just 2kgs ("Are you kidding?" I hear you say...), it'll slip into your gig bag and then perch proportionately on the 102 PURE cab. The ins and outs are as you'd expect: jack in, XLR DI out (variable, with a ground lift), send and return jacks (assignable pre or post), stereo footswitch jack, and two output jacks plus a speakon output. There's also a mute switch (can be footswitched) and an "always on" low end limiter – so you don't blow up anything with the low end thud that this amp produces. The really cool stuff is the "Old School" knob (a sensible re-branding of their VLE knob), which progressively cuts treble, and the "Scooped" switch (a pre-set version of their VPF circuit), which dramatically cuts the mids and boosts the lows and highs – if you want to hear some serious funk popping, this is the place to go. This "classic V" setting is also footswitchable, for those who want to use it as a momentary effect.

Alternating between a Fender PJ-style bass and a fretless MusicMan StingRay, this amp/speaker recipe dishes up a broad and even tonal palette. The lows are deep but still dynamic, and park it near a wall or baffle and those bass notes will quickly bloom around you – thanks to the rear ports. The mids have a nice presence and there's no hard knee from one range to another. The top end has as much snap or rounded sweetness as you'd like, thanks to the combination of the treble knob, the "old school" circuit, and those clever tweeter switches. The Fender's P pickup can have that classic R&R thump or an edgy scoop, while its J pickup serves up classic funk without ever being harsh. The StingRay's more hi-fi humbucker is gloriously rich and articulate through this Markbass system. Even bass chords (does anyone do that anymore?) hang together nicely because there's so much clarity in the amp and cab that the overtones find their own space. And, if you're playing a fretless (does anyone do that anymore, either?), hit that Scoop switch and get ready for some seriously woody whine.

Markbass are continually pushing the limits of both tone and technology: this head and cabinet are prime examples of this. The balance of tone, punch, and clarity is second to none, and the facilities available to create your own sound, no matter what style you're into, are easy to access and understand. It's a tone afficionado's amp with a working-class attitude. Great tone, heaps of power, easy to lug...what more could you want? It even has an illuminated input jack so you're not fluffing around on a dark stage.

But be warned: this is a hi fidelity-type system, and that means you'll hear every little pop, squeak or whatever. So, it'll either drive you a little crazy or make you a better player. Your choice.



▶ VERDICT

The Little Mark 58R and 102 Pure work together superbly, delivering a studio-quality tone with enough volume for almost any stage. Add to that its pro-level facilities and ultra-portable design, and this is super value for money.

▶ PROS

- Great tone / volume portability.
- Pro-quality build.
- Simple operation.

▶ CONS

- None.

▶ CONTACT

CMC MUSIC
Ph: (02) 9905 2511
Web: cmcmusic.com.au

RRP: $5,449

Godin Radium-X

Mixing magnetic and piezo pickups, Godin is back with serious intent if this Radium-X is anything to go by. But it comes at a price. Worth a punt? We plug in... Review by **Dave Burrluck**

It's been a while since we featured a Godin electric in these pages. And you don't need us to tell you that quite a lot has happened since then. World events, factory shutdowns and the rising price of raw materials, parts and shipping have all played their part. So you have to doff your cap because if Godin is to retain – or, perhaps more accurately, regain – some market share, then this new Radium-X is quite a statement of intent.

Multi-voice, innovative guitars have been a cornerstone of Godin's output over recent decades: instruments built with purpose in mind. The Radium-X falls bang into that category with its blend of pickups – standard magnetic with less-standard piezo – creating a 'hybrid' electric-plus-acoustic platform. But before we get there, there's plenty going on with the instrument itself.

The body shape here has already been used on the standard Radium and Stadium models, a Telecaster-inspired outline with a pulled out bass-side shoulder and slightly thinner treble-side horn. The back is mahogany, two-piece centre-joined, and by tapping our fingernails around the body it sounds like it's fairly extensively chambered on the lower bass side of the body, behind the vibrato rout, and quite extensively on the treble side, too. That hollowed structure, around 36mm deep, is topped with a 15mm thick one-piece swamp ash top that has a shallow violin-like carve, giving an overall depth of 51.6mm and a rim depth of approximately 40mm. Outwardly, the back is carved, too, with a deep ribcage contour that flows into smaller chamfering around the back's edges. The heel is left pretty square but somehow suits the rather classic style: the deep red stain to the mahogany recalls the craft of the jazz-era archtop, as do those nicotine-stained two-piece inlays, which also feature on a trio of new Godin 5th Avenue Jumbo models, the Montreal Premiere Limited and the solidbody Summit Classic.

This evocative vibe continues with the mahogany neck, which has a head-splice around the position of the two lower tuning machines, but you really have to look closely to spot it. That very classic three-a-side headstock is dead classy, although here it's faced with a black/white/black plastic laminate, giving echoes of Godin's Radiator. We've previously criticised Godin for its proliferation of brand logos on the one guitar, but not here. There's just the engraved headstock logo, that's it.

Our review model is finished in Rustic Burst 'semi gloss', but it's super smooth to the touch and very thin, which allows you to feel the grain lines in the ash top. Overall, it's one of the smartest builds we've ever seen from Godin.

Now, if Godin had simply loaded in a couple of decent humbuckers with some basic switching you'd still have quite a guitar. But there's much more going on here, the centre of which is the well-respected LR Baggs X-Bridge, a two-post vibrato with individual piezo elements mounted within the block saddles. Typically well designed and made, it also features a push-in-and-screw tension-adjustable arm and sits in a lightly recessed rout. Both magnetic pickups mount to the body with a little height adjustment: a Bare Knuckle Boot Camp True Grit at the bridge, uncovered with zebra coils, while a covered Seymour Duncan Jazz gets the neck position.

The upper shoulder-placed toggle selects the magnetic pickups as usual, then we get a master volume and tone that sit in recessed divots. Likewise, the X-Bridge's volume/blend control, which is the lower Strat-like black knob (although another amber top hat is provided in the gigbag if you want a more matched appearance). The small three-position mini-toggle switch gives us piezo only (down), magnetic only (up), and both systems together (middle). You can run the magnetic and piezo into two separate amps via the two output jacks, or use the jack closest to the strap button for a mixed mono output into one amp.

First off, the pretty light weight of 3.39kg is very engaging, as is the neck profile, which is Fender-y in width (42.4mm at the nut, 51.8mm by the 12th) with a subtly V'd back shape that actually feels a little deeper than it measures (21.2mm at the 1st fret, 23.6mm at the 12th). The fingerboard sides are incurving and the top edges are lightly rolled, and on the 305mm (12-inch) face the medium jumbo wire (2.42 by 1.2mm) is a good choice. It's well set up, too, especially considering that it shipped directly from Canada to Guitarist HQ. There's virtually zero relief and an airy action height of 1.5mm on the treble side, 1.7mm on the bass side. You really get the impression that someone has put some time and care into this setup: it plays very well and, unplugged, there's a lively response. The guitar feels very alive.

Starting with the magnetic voices, the Jazz at the neck is a near-perfect choice with its classic output, not over-thick and with a clarity that may well be pared back by the instrument's construction. It cleans up really well with some volume reduction, thinning the sound and becoming a little more single-coil-like, but back on full throttle it's beautifully vocal and Gibson-esque. The medium-output True Grit again seems slightly pulled back in terms of its high-end response, resulting in quite a mid-forward kick that seems aimed at the hotter side of classic blues and rock, and through a cranked gain-y amp sounds seriously thick yet still pretty articulate. It's a shame there's no coil-split here, but volume reduction is your friend if you want a little more cut and to reduce the heft.

Switching to piezo mode, still from the mixed mono output, that lower piezo blend control doesn't function and the magnetic volume becomes your master, the tone just pulling back some high treble right at the end of its travel. In 'both-on' mode the black knobbed control now acts as a blend for the piezo, while the magnetic volume and tone also act as master controls.

Using the separate outputs to two separate amps things change again. The gold knobs act on the mags and the black becomes a volume for the piezo. There's no master volume now, so if, for example, you get a nice balance between the two sounds but just want to lower your level, then you need to pull back both volumes.

Nevertheless, the actual piezo 'acoustic' voice is good. It's not going to fool anyone that you're playing a nicely mic'd Martin, but the acoustic-like brightness and zing can certainly cover acoustic intros and the like in those tricky cover-band sets. And going mixed mono into an AER, aside from adding to the acoustic illusion, you've got your jazz gigs covered where the piezo can add just a little clarity to that neck humbucker.

While the modern 'hybrid' electric with acoustic sounds goes back to the early 90s, it remains a hugely valid tool for the right player needing to cover both bases, or the creative musician looking for new hybrid sounds by combining the two. This Radium-X's unshowy, quite classic dress hides some superb sounds along with plenty of choice in how you use them. It's a thoughtful design, and straight out of its gigbag is a really good player that's also light in weight.

▶ VERDICT

it's not a cheap date or impulse purchase, but so long as Godin can keep its pricing in check, consider the brand back in the game. A welcome return.

▶ PROS

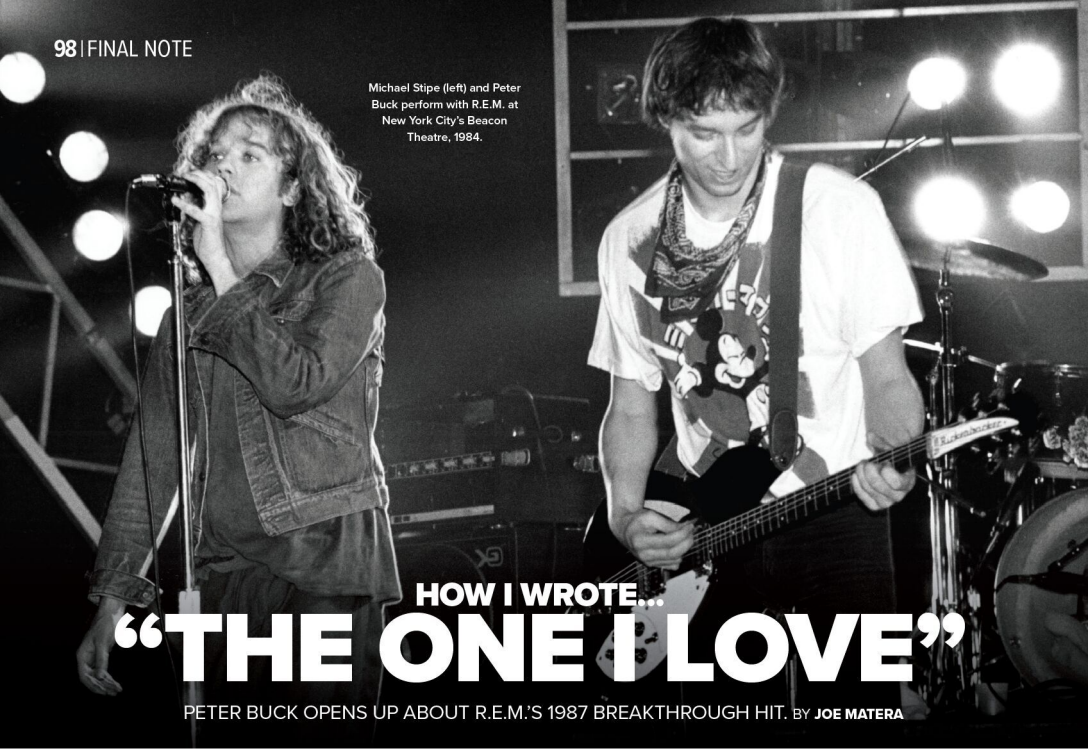
- Classic chambered-body build.
- Great neck profile, weight and sounds.

▶ CONS

- Colour choice could be expanded.

▶ CONTACT

DYNAMIC MUSIC
Ph: 0299391299
Web: dynamicmusic.com.au



Michael Stipe (left) and Peter Buck perform with R.E.M. at New York City's Beacon Theatre, 1984.

Elvid Roberts/Redferns/GETTY IMAGES

HOW I WROTE...

"THE ONE I LOVE"

PETER BUCK OPENS UP ABOUT R.E.M.'S 1987 BREAKTHROUGH HIT. BY **JOE MATERA**

"IT WAS ABOUT fucking time!" R.E.M. guitarist Peter Buck exclaims on recalling the group finally achieving its first U.S Top 10 hit with 1987's "The One I Love." "In America, it was like radio stations just weren't interested in whatever we did. It was never the right thing. But we sold a lot of records, and that single definitely changed the way the world perceived us. And all of a sudden, our audiences doubled."

NOT LOVE, ACTUALLY

It had been a long hard slog for the alt-rockers, who formed in 1980 and released four albums prior to 1987's Document, which included "The One I Love." Buck recalls coming up with the riff while on his front porch, noodling around on his guitar.

"I remember just sitting there and playing almost the whole song all the way through," he says. "And then I showed it to the rest of the guys, and boom! Musically, it was there within one or two passes. Then Michael [Stipe] sang it within a day after coming up with the lyrics. It was one of those instantaneous things."

While its lyrics allude to the subject of love, the song is often misinterpreted, Buck says. "It's really a dark song," he explains. "At first I thought, God, it's a love song. But then I was listening to the playback, and I went, Oh, it's not. But it can pass for one if you're not paying attention."

LITT UP

Recording sessions for the track began at Sound Emporium Studios, in Nashville, under the watchful eye of newly installed producer Scott Litt. "Document was the first record where Scott began working with us," Buck says. "He had a great ear and also had really good ideas about how to get the best out of us, so we didn't waste a lot of time. I could count on him knowing everything was going to sound great. I didn't have to sit there worrying about things like the second-rack tom and the tone of it, I could listen to it and know that everything was going to be fine. He was a great producer for us."

Litt was integral to helping Buck achieve the guitar sound he was after. "He helped immensely with the layering of my guitars," he says. "I didn't want to overdo it, but at the same time I didn't want to have just one guitar, like on a demo. Underneath the main guitar track there is a live guitar track, which I doubled with my black 1981 Rickenbacker 360 Jetglo that was strung with round-wound strings. I used a .014 on the high E and went down to a .058 on the low E. I overdubbed the guitar solo. When I realized there was going to be a solo, I did one that's more of a musical statement than a real solo. There were no effect pedals, as I never really used pedals in the studio at all, unless I actually had to.

"The track used various amps, as at that point I had a Mesa/Boogie and a Vox AC30 and went back and forth with those. There is also an acoustic guitar overdub buried in the mix. The acoustic was an early '60s Gibson rented from Gruhn Guitars."

THE ONE I SOMETIMES LOVE

"The One I Love" debuted at 84 on the Billboard Hot 100 in September 1987 and peaked at number nine in early December. "Having the chart success was important in that it meant we were reaching a larger audience," Buck says. Afterward, the band was labeled a jangle-pop group. "But that never bothered me, because, to a certain degree, it was true," he says. "There was that period in America where it was all jangly guitars, and every single band sounded like a bad version of R.E.M. But we did a lot of other stuff too, and there's plenty of records where it's really noisy, heavy and chaotic."

The song continued to be a fan favorite over the band's long run, which lasted until 2011. "We had it in our set list for a while, and then it wasn't, and then it came back," Buck explains. "To be honest, it wasn't a song I think that any of us felt was totally from the heart. It was just a cool song. It wasn't something I felt like I had to play at every gig. But at a certain point you realize that the audience really likes it, so why not put it in the set?"

G300 RAW

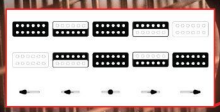
As a follow-up variant of the widely successful, multi-awarded G300 Pro, the new G300 Raw sets out to be a lasting classic that offers guitarists a studio-grade, highly-versatile guitar with top-tier build quality and components and a organic prestigious look accented by the addition of smooth satin walnut top. The G300 Raw is constructed with the 6mm walnut top on a chambered African mahogany body that produces a balanced tone and warmth in the mid-lows with great sustain and response, perfect for playing heavy riffs or long soulful solos, while keeping the body weight light thanks to its chambered body. The Rosewood fretboard on an African mahogany neck provides excellent tone transfer and long sustain with tight low-end.

- Ergo-V Neck Profile
- Compound Radius Fretboard (12" - 15.75")
- Graphite Reinforced Neck
- Graph Tech Black TUSQ Nut
- Stainless Steel Frets

Seymour Duncan SH2N & TB4 Humbucker

The Seymour Duncan TB4 bridge humbucker and SH2N neck humbucker combined with a special 5-way wiring present all of the great modern and classic humbucker tones and two exceptional single-coil sounds for unmatched versatility with a clean and simple control layout. From over-the-top metal and shred to jazzy warmth and sparkling clean, the sounds are always musical with clarity as well as depth.

The 5-way switch is custom-wired to provide glassy and sparkling single-coil sounds in the 2nd and 4th positions as well as the full-bodied and powerful humbucker sounds in the bridge, middle and neck positions.



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